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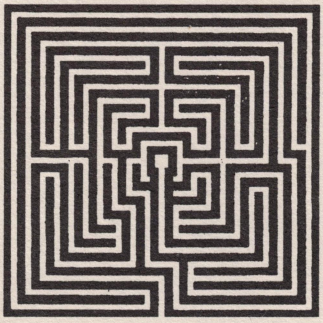

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# VOX

Welcome to Issue 30.
This has been the most difficult 'Vox' to write, knowing that it might be the last. **Rubberneck** is funded *entirely* by advertising, and the present slump in advertising revenue means that the magazine's future is now in doubt. Fortunately, there was just enough money in the account to make up the shortfall in advertising for **Rubberneck 30**, otherwise this issue would not have been published. If sufficient advertising revenue is not raised for the next issue in June 2000, that issue will not appear. Charging a small sum for the magazine is not the solution; this approach was tried for Issues 1 - 4, and failed. When it comes to marginalised music like improv, a free magazine reaches more readers in more places worldwide. The solution, then, is simple. More advertisers (new advertisers!) are needed, beyond the small number of regular advertisers (and regular readers will know who these wonderful people are) whose loyal support has helped **Rubberneck** get this far. To the many small record labels out there specialising in experimental musics: **Rubberneck** needs you...
...do you need **Rubberneck**?

And the contents... A surprisingly rare interview with the doyen of vocal improv, Phil Minton; the strange world of Japanese-American improvisor Miya Masaoka revealed; Gino Robair, America's most innovative improv percussionist, provides strategic inspiration; and the **Rubberneck** Reviews Team choose their favourite works of the past century. Keep in touch!
Chris Blackford/December 1999

**30**

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Cover Image
Lost Maze #3

"And that's my end, for man can wish no more,
Than so to write, as none e'er writ before."
**Rochester** (1647-1680)

If you find mistakes in this magazine, please remember that they are there for a purpose. We try to publish something for everyone, and some people are always looking for mistakes.

# For a few doughnuts more

**Brian Marley** talks to virtuoso British improv vocalist **Phil Minton** about choirs, improvisation, bad plumbing, and the difference (if any) between voice and instrument.

photo: Dagmar Gebers

There are vocalists who improvise, and there are improvising vocalists. The former tend to be jazz singers who emulate the phrasing of saxophonists and trumpeters. The latter, a much more diverse and interesting bunch, noticed how instrumentalists were expanding their range by using unconventional techniques, and addressed the voice in a like manner. One of the things they did was reduce voice — the first musical instrument — to a set of pre-linguistic vocalisations (laughter, sighs, growls, hisses, screams, panting, belches, snorts, grunts, etc). These vocalisations, together with more refined methods of voice production, were then yoked to the abstract language of improvisation, creating a 'style' of singing that had enormous expressive potential.

Phil Minton (born 1940) does all of that and more. He is, for example, one of the few vocalists on the scene capable of interpreting lyrics intelligently, and adding interest to their collateral. In the 1960s he took a series of workaday jobs with dance bands, belting out cover versions of soul music hits. That's what he was doing in Sweden in 1969 when his off-hours, fledgeling free music quartet with Lars Göran Ulander, Lars Gunnar Gunnarson and Sten Öberg came to be recorded. The music on **Up Umea** (1) contained elements of hard bop and field hollers, but it wore a baggy suit rather than a straitjacket, and soon the suit would be taken to the cleaners and never reclaimed.

The eruption of free improv in the early 1970s was akin to a musical Big Bang: a whole new language evolved within only a year or two (or so it seemed), and Minton was its finest vocal exponent. Since then, for the best part of three decades, he has been expanding the idiom and refining its use. His recordings provide convincing answers to many of the questions one would wish to ask about how this music is made, but there's always something new and valuable to be learned.

*As with so many people in the UK who sing professionally, your musical life seems to have begun in the school choir. Chris Blackford, in his review of your solo discs in* ***Rubberneck 29****, described 'Wood Song One' (2) as having "an almost sacred ambience, close to plainchant..." There's also the choral writing of the 'Prologue' and 'Epilogue' in* ***Songs From A Prison Diary*** *(3). Otherwise this influence on your work is not always easy to detect. Is there a wayward chorister lurking within you still?*

**PM** I was never actually in the school choir, my school didn't have such a thing. It was a choir in a small church just round the corner from my house. There was a little gang of us. We got, I don't know, sixpence for singing on Sundays. I was probably a

bit too disruptive to be a choirboy for very long. But my family was Welsh, and my father and uncle were members of the local male voice choir, which was full of Welshmen who'd moved to Torquay during the depression looking for work. My mother's father was a tenor soloist in the Tredegar male voice choir. Mum had an amazing voice; she was a wonderful, over the top, high note soprano. Singing and choirs were always a talking point in our house. My mum would say things like [adopts a Welsh accent], "Those people up the road, well, they're very nice people — but they can't sing!" I was really quite interested in, and curious about, the possibility of changing sounds, the way voices can change. I found it quite easy. I could do a very good impersonation of Kathleen Ferrier, and jump to 'Snozzle' Durrante and Al Jolson and various other people, including members of my family. My father was a bass, my uncle a tenor, and I tried to sing like my mother as well. So my musical life started within the family.

## sacred ambience

You're wondering about 'Wood Song One'. Well, 'Wood Song' was a melodic line that... I don't really know how melodic lines happen. I composed it when I was living in Lapland in 1968. It's all the trees, lakes and snow — perhaps they give off a sacred ambience. Just think of ECM and those Norwegians. 'Prologue' is also a line from that period. I'd been waiting to find a use for this, and when Armand Meignan of the Le Mans Festival requested a piece for choir and myself, he asked if it could reflect the Welsh male voice choir influence on my work. This seemed the perfect piece for it. The 'Epilogue' is Veryan Weston's variations on the 'Prologue' theme, as is the harmony writing on 'Prologue'. He was a proper chorister at Salisbury. The melodic lines were mine, but... actually I never sang in the choir [Voices From Somewhere], I was much too wayward to be a part of that.

*Up Umea, a Swedish TV broadcast from 1969, has recently been issued on CD. It documents your free-style singing at an early stage of development, and demonstrates what a fine trumpet player you were. There are, I think, two questions that need to be asked. Why did you sideline the trumpet? More importantly for what came later, were you aware of any kind of precedent for the vocal explorations you were embarking on?*

**"I could do a very good impersonation of Kathleen Ferrier, and jump to 'Snozzle' Durrante and Al Jolson and various other people, including members of my family. My father was a bass, my uncle a tenor, and I tried to sing like my mother as well. So my musical life started within the family."**

**PM** Actually, **Up Umea** was never broadcast. I don't think so. But we did get to use the studio facilities, and the session had a pretty good sound for those days... Up until about the age of 15 my only instrument was voice — and whistling. I couldn't read music. I went to a secondary modern school, left at 15, and went to work in a terrible printing works. When I was 15 or 16, I heard Louis Armstrong playing the trumpet, and I wanted to play the trumpet too. I always loved Louis' singing. Soon I was listening to Dizzy Gillespie and Miles. Oh, by the way [he laughs], the reason I chose the trumpet — well, one of the reasons — is because it had three valves and looked easier than saxophone.

A record that in 1957 made a big impression on me was Miles Davis' **Cooking**. On the first track, 'Airegin', Coltrane's sound was just about the most exciting thing I'd ever heard. I was completely and utterly hooked on music by then. I didn't know what was going on, and I couldn't find anybody in Torquay who could help me; there were certainly no jazz schools around or anything like that. But I persevered and tried to find things out for myself, and I played the trumpet and joined a local band which was a bit jazzy and bluesy. I mainly sang blues with them.

We entered a jazz contest — this was 1962 — in

Taunton, and there was this other band, the Mike Westbrook Band. A little bit later I did a jam session with John Surman in Newton Abbot, and he asked me to come up to London to work with the Westbrook Band, which included Keith Rowe, Mike Osborne and Lou Gare. That was the early part of 1963. It was so cold that winter, really freezing. Anyway, that was the start of the early 60s free jazz movement. In the States, Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders and Ayler were making changes to the way their instruments sounded, and I found this tricky on the trumpet. I then started seriously but tentatively to explore, and I tried to do it with my voice. I wasn't too successful at first because I didn't have the technique for it. So I stuck to the trumpet.

## owning up

As for the second part of your question... I was always trying to find jazz programmes on a short wave radio in the 50s, early 60s. I was aware of not knowing where a lot of the music was coming from — weird places, other places. But I used to hear voices that... the timbre was so different. I used to wonder why Italian tenors sounded like they did, and blues singers sounded like blues singers. All the different techniques for producing voices: flamenco singers, Indian, African and Arabic singers. By the mid to late 60s, when I was living in northern Sweden, I heard Yojk music, and that tied in with ethnic music from other countries around the world. And it must have been around that time I heard Tuvan and Buddhist singers. Anyway, I was hearing all this, and I couldn't really get the sounds I wanted on the trumpet, and I think I had basically to own up to myself what was happening. I'd learned the trumpet to gain credibility, to give me — I don't think I was entirely conscious of this, mind you — the confidence to do what I'd always been doing naturally since I was a kid, playing with my voice, making different sounds, different timbres and colourings, and techniques for producing my sort of music.

*Analogies for some of the sounds you make — cats squabbling, Donald Duckisms, etc — have become part of the critical lexicon. Critics also tend to focus on specific sounds rather than attempt to describe the flow of events. This is perhaps unsurprising as the sounds, especially in context, are complex, difficult to describe, even harder to evaluate. But it must be irksome to you. Do you have any comment to make about how your music is perceived?*

**PM** I think you forgot to list "bad plumbing". I suppose it's a particularly uninspired kind of writing. I wish it sometimes went even more over the top than the review I'm going to send you (4). I think the Donald Duck palaver is a little bit obvious, and it only applies to the technique which is called parabuccal, using the cheeks as vibrating membranes. I first heard this technique on a tape — given to me by a German colleague — of a Folkways record. It was about speech after a patient's cancerous larynx had been removed. I do something rather different, a mixture of throat and cheek sounds. I suppose an analogy is: if somebody had heard only one well-known electric guitar sound, say John McLaughlin's, and then he heard Derek Bailey play, he'd think, "That sound is like John McLaughlin's."

*Is a sense of composition or structure particularly important to you, or do you go from moment to moment, travelling hopefully?*

**PM** Often the only thing that improvisors do at rehearsals is decide whether to play one set or two.

## visceral activity

*According to John Potter of the Hilliard Ensemble, "singing is a visceral activity, the voice is the only instrument which is directly expressive of mind and body. Singing is a personal and physical statement which is firmly rooted in the here and now..." (5) He seems, perhaps unconsciously, to be suggesting that improvisation is a natural state for singers, much more so than for instrumentalists.*

**PM** I don't think improvisation is a natural state just for singers; there are instrumentalists such as Albert Ayler who sound like the music is visceral, coming from deep inside them. But music education knocks the improvisation out of most people. And people nowadays can go on jazz courses to learn to be 1950s jazz musicians, which

is sad and rather tragic.

*Certainly, singing would appear to be a different kind of activity from playing the trumpet. But the difference between texted and untexted singing is almost as great. **Songs From A Prison Diary**, despite the amount of improvisation it contains, is a very different enterprise from, say, your most recent solo disc, **A Doughnut In One Hand** (FMP CD91, 1996 CD).*

photo: Dagmar Gebers

**PM** Singing is... well, it's a little bit different from playing the trumpet, but not that different. You have to push, press, blow and pull — that's what instrumentalists do — amplify fart sounds from lips, force them through bits of piping and then alter the length of them. You stretch strings, vibrate materials in constricted environments. But singers generate similar sounds within the body. I read somewhere that if you could blow through Caruso's vocal cords, and then blow through a barrow boy's vocal cords, it would be very hard to tell the difference between them. They're just lumps of flesh, similar to a tuba player's lip [makes a low, loose-lipped blurting noise], a trombonist's lip [blurting noise pitched somewhat higher], or a trumpet player's lip [compressed, high pitched noise which has a singing quality]. So I don't think singing is that much different from playing an instrument. But the singing of words is certainly a different kettle of fish, and if I could really write words I would sing them more often. I do a lot of searching for interesting words.

It was Veryan who found a book of poems by Ho Chi Minh in an Oxfam shop in Welwyn Garden City, and it just seemed so lovely because I don't think anybody really knew about Ho Chi Minh the poet. The poems touched us, they really did. It was great to perform **Songs From A Prison Diary** in France, because Dien Bien Phu wasn't that long ago. Those singers were the best we could possibly get, and we got the money to do it in France. We'd love to be able to do it again. But if you try to talk to the assholes in this country [England] about putting on something like that they go, "Yes, but, ah, um, well, ah, well, yes, um." You can just imagine it. This is the most philistine country in the world! But I suppose that in terms of funding America is even worse.

*Whenever there's a voice in an ensemble, the listener's attention is drawn to it, even if what's being sung is untexted or barely comprehensible, even if the voice isn't being showcased. Perhaps that's why we've taken wholeheartedly to that most vocal of reed instruments, the saxophone. Piano is another matter entirely — unvocal, machine-like. As a singer, how do you relate to these instruments?*

## sound territory

**PM** When working with, say, John Butcher I feel we're really exploring the same sound territory, using different vehicles and maybe taking different paths, but ending up in some of the same places. I feel that with Roger Turner as well. And with a lot of... actually, not a lot of... those are the people I work with most in this area (6). But, yes, I do think of the piano as a machine, and I find it a very hard instrument to improvise with. My work with Veryan, which is much more obviously structured, actually comes from, as you put it, travelling hopefully from moment to moment, trusting that things will turn out all right. I improvise a lot, and Veryan — the scholar that he is — organises it afterwards; which is something like a perfect match. Our best work is a very nice mixture of spontaneous, undisciplined stuff that Veryan pulls together.

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*Mouthfull of ecstasy (7), for example?*

**PM** That's right. **Mouthfull of ecstasy** is a particularly good example. We genuinely enjoyed Joyce's words. The structure of *Finnegan's Wake*, word by word, sentence by sentence, is really musical.

**"I have absolutely no interest at all in being funny, or trying to make people laugh — although people do. Some people almost piss themselves. I remember a solo gig in Norway where there was hysteria."**

*I can see why you chose it. Joyce — who apparently had a fine tenor voice — was keen to achieve a musical quality of line. And as his work progressed, conveying straightforward meaning appeared to be less important to him. So using the book in this way is one of the logical steps we can take to deal with it.*

**PM** That's exactly what we thought.

*Tell me a little bit about Bob Ostertag's* ***Say No More*** *(8).*

**PM** I'd known Bob since his early days in New York — late 70s, early 80s — but he was off the scene for some time, working as a journalist in South America. Then, after I hadn't heard anything from him for quite a few years, he phoned and asked me to take part in this project. He explained who else would be involved [Mark Dresser, Joey Baron], and said could I lay down about 15 minutes of improvisation on DAT. I did this at a friend's flat in King's Cross. All of the musicians recorded their stuff separately. I sent the tape over to him and more or less forgot about it. Projects like this turn up all the time, but most come to nothing. Anyway, about 18 months later [1993] he sent me the finished piece. I was really knocked out by what he'd done; it was impossible music, but it sounded as if we'd got together and done it... almost.

*If you could breathe through your ears.*

**PM** [laughs] Yeah, that's right. But I'm not the only one who would have had trouble. Joey Baron is pretty amazing, but the composition that Bob made from our improvisations would be tough even for him. It's virtual music, like some of the drum 'n' bass stuff that kids are doing. But **Say No More** sounds less strange today than it did in 1992. People are getting used to the idea of music that exists only in this medium, that only machines can play.

*You and the other musicians learned the parts that Ostertag had constructed for* ***Say No More****, is that right? And you took the project on the road as* ***Say No More In Person*** *(9).*

**PM** We toured, yes. But I didn't learn my part, it would have been impossible.

*You approximated it, and improvised around that?*

**PM** Well, they were improvisations in the first place. Bob had formalised them and made them into a composition, and we... de-formalised them. We were allowed to do pretty much what we wanted. It was a fairly intense performance. We toured **Say No More** pretty successfully around Europe.

## arrogant assumption

But let's get back to the piano... Did I tell you that story about performing with Mike Westbrook in a square in Italy? This was a festival back in the 70s. It was a cool summer night, we'd done a very nice concert of, I think, the Blake songs (10). There had been groups on before us, and afterwards other groups including some Kathakali musicians and dancers. Later, I was in the audience, and the Kathakali musicians came over and said how much they'd enjoyed our performance. But they really wanted to know what it was that the big man was playing... rather like a marimba. I couldn't work out what they meant. I thought maybe it was

drums, percussion or something. Then I twigged and said, "You don't mean Mike playing the piano, do you?" And the one guy who spoke very good English said, "Yes. That's it." And I mimed playing the piano. He turned to the other Kathakali musicians and said, "Piano." And they all said, "Piano, piano," like they'd never heard of it.

This isn't a story about their ignorance of western music, it's about our arrogant assumption that *everybody* would recognise this instrument. Pianos dominate western music but, I mean, maybe 80% of the world has never seen or heard them or knows anything about them.

*There's a rich vein of humour in your music; for example, 'Janna Li(v)e' by Roof (11). Are you conscious, mid-improvisation, of the humorous aspects of what you're doing, and the way the audience is reacting to it?*

**PM** I have absolutely no interest at all in being funny, or trying to make people laugh — although people do. Some people almost piss themselves. I remember a solo gig in Norway where there was hysteria. I suppose it's to do with the juxtaposition of different sorts of sounds. But I really don't intend to make people laugh, it's not intentional. I suppose a grown man standing onstage making 'silly sounds', well... that's other people's problem. Some things are going to sound funny even when there's no conscious attempt to make it happen. What I feel is that everything in music is abstract. Is there such a thing as abstract humour? For me, all sound is innocent.

## doughnuts

*The drainage songs on **A Doughnut In One Hand** are, I assume, a reference to your sinuses. The doughnut references are harder to fathom. What is their significance?*

**PM** You're dead wrong about the drainage songs, nothing at all to do with sinuses, but... I don't mind telling you another little story. This one's about doughnuts. It was when I was getting the stuff together for Fred Frith to put out as **A Doughnut In Both Hands.** I was in New York doing gigs with some of the Lower East Side musicians. For some reason I was standing around on a cold January

photo: Bob Van Dantzig

day, waiting for Charlie Noyes to come over from somewhere down in the Bowery. This was before it became swish. It's pretty smart these days. So there I was, shivering on one of the streets that run parallel to the Bowery, waiting for Charlie. In the slushy snow a jogger zoomed past in all the gear, and there, at the same time, in the gutter, was one of the Bowery's residents. As the jogger went zooming up the road, the Bowery gentleman turned and looked at me and said [Minton adopts a Brooklyn accent], "What the fuck's this guy doin'? What the fuck's he doin'? He's gonna have to run all the way to the South Bronx and back to lose half a fuckin' pound. Do you know what the trouble is? Americans eat too much. Too fuckin' much, man. They're too fuckin' fat, everybody in America's fat, they eat too fuckin' much. You know, the other day the mission took us out to Long Island, and some of those guys, some of those guys they had doughnuts in both fuckin' hands, can you believe it? Doughnuts in both hands! Doughnuts in BOTH HANDS! Good day to you, sir. Have a nice day." **R**

**NOTES**

(1) Blue Tower Records BTCD 07 CD.

(2) Recorded 15 August 1975 for **A Doughnut In**

**Both Hands**, issued in 1981 by Fred Frith's Rift Records. Reissued in 1998 with additional tracks on Emanem 4025 CD.
(3) Leo CD LR196 CD, with pianist Veryan Weston and the choir of soloists, Voices From Somewhere. Minton and Weston's setting of poems by Ho Chi Minh was awarded the Cornelius Cardew Composition Prize in 1991. Minton also has an eclectic song based duo with Weston; see **Ways Past** (ITM 1468, 1992 CD). Another fine example of Minton's text based singing is Lindsay Cooper's **Sahara Dust** (Intakt CD029, 1992 CD).
(4) A perceptively written, overblown, polemical review of Minton's second solo album, **A Doughnut In One Hand** (FMP CD91, 1996 CD), by Kenneth Goldsmith, New York Press (USA), 17 November 1998. For a superb article about Minton, see 'Phil Minton: The Sound of Colour' by Paul Dutton, *Coda Magazine*, issue 269, September/October 1996.
(5) John Potter, 'Reconstructing Lost Voices', in *Companion To Medieval And Renaissance Music* (1992), London, JM Dent & Sons Ltd, p. 311.
(6) Fine examples of his work with these musicians include **Dada da** with Roger Turner (Leo CD LR 192, 1993 CD) and **Two Concerts** with John Butcher and Erhard Hirt (FMP OWN-90006, 1995 CD).
(7) Phil Minton Quartet (with John Butcher, Roger Turner, Veryan Weston), **Mouthfull of ecstasy** (Victo CD041 CD). A remarkable album.
(8) Bob Ostertag, **Say No More** (ReCDeC 59 CD).
(9) Bob Ostertag, **Say No More In Person** (Transit 444444 CD).
(10) See Mike Westbrook's recently recorded **Glad Day** (Enja ENJ-9376 CD) in which Minton has a feature role.
(11) Roof, **Trace** (Red Note 7 CD). Earlier, in 1996, this superb quartet of Minton, Tom Cora, Luc Ex and Michael Vatcher recorded **The Untraceable Cigar** (Red Note 4 CD). See also Trio Trabant A Roma (Minton, Lindsay Cooper and Alfred 23 Harth), **State Of Volgograd** (FMP CD57, 1991 CD).

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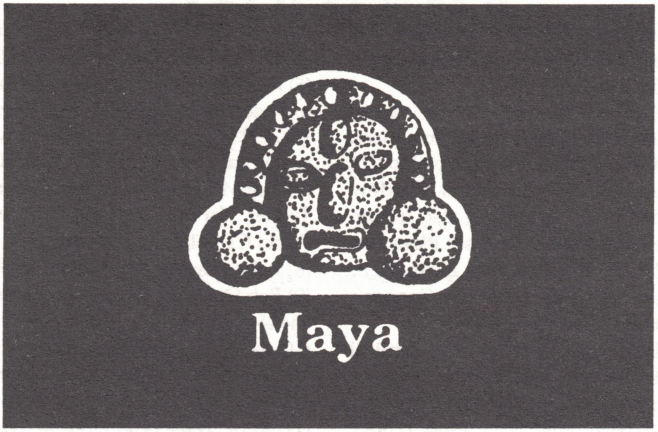


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# sound sculptors

## Hal Rammel reviews a new book about **Bernard** and **François Baschet**

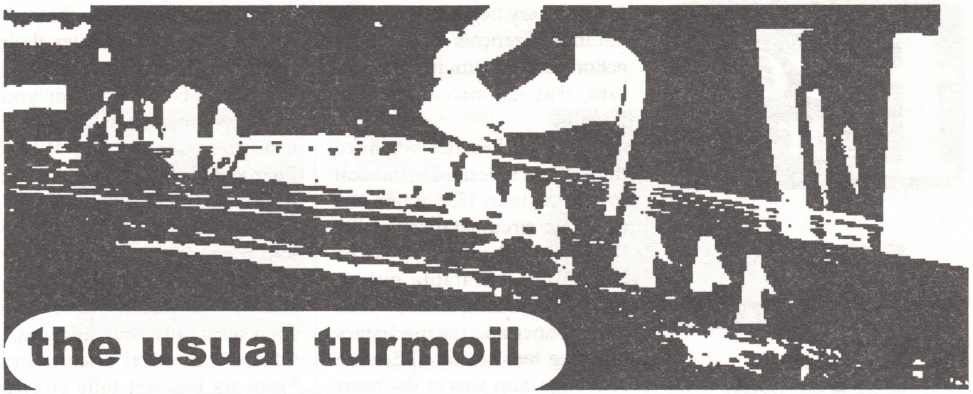
**Les Sculptures Sonores: The Sound Sculptures Of Bernard And François Baschet**
By François Baschet
Soundworld (£14.99 PBK & CD)

According to François Baschet: "Musical instruments are like falseteeth. One gets used to the old ones. Newness often hurts." This observation occurs in the context of a description of he and his brother Bernard's experiments with "the weeping piano", an elaborate reconstruction turning the insides of a mid-1800s piano into one of their animate sound sculptures surmounted by their ever-present, ever-alert conical resonators. The text of **Les Sculptures Sonores** draws such wry commentary from the diaries of François Baschet, covering not only the methodical experimentation that has characterized their work from its very beginnings but, in addition, François' own recollections of their unique encounters, travels, successes, and travails.

François Baschet began to think about redesigning musical instruments in 1952 when the nomadic circumstances of his life inspired prototypes for a foldable deflatable guitar. Radical rethinking of the physics of resonance and the mechanics of string tension, amplification and projection was at the heart of these first experiments. By 1955 his brother Bernard, who ran a saw mill in southern France, became involved in these ideas, extending these concepts in more sculptural directions. That same year, the Baschets met pianists Jacques and Yvonne Lasry who enthusiastically began to explore techniques for playing these very new instruments, eventually making the first recordings on les sculptures sonores in the mid 1960s.

The range of the Baschets' work is astounding: from shimmering stainless steel concert ensembles, to monumental light-catching and wind-driven sound sculptures for public spaces, to subtle and engaging instruments for the musical education of deaf children. This comprehensive examination of these works reveals not only a great deal about their physical and acoustical innovations, but also an abundance of wonderful anecdotes. For example, Jacques Lasry was once asked to compose music for the Crazy Horse Saloon in Paris for a dance number in which chorus girls would wear Marcel Duchamp's spinning rotoreliefs over their navels. Edith Piaf once advised the Baschets: "Whenever you have free time, even if it's only a minute, sit down." When Bernard and François first appeared on Ed Sullivan's TV variety show in the 1960s, he told them: "Play well, but play fast, for in our modern childish society, the public's attention span lasts only four minutes." Of more musical encounters François Baschet tells stories of meeting Edgard Varese (who hoped to one day compose for their instruments), Toru Takemitsu (Stomu Yamash'ta performed on les sculptures sonores in Takemitsu's 1970 composition *Seasons*), John Cage, and David Tudor.

Unfortunately the rather flat design of this book's pages does not lend itself to easily following the time-line of this narrative. Chapter titles in the table of contents frequently don't match headings on the pages listed. There is no index which would make reference to various instruments and their history, or to discussions of acoustics and various innovations, much more easily accessible. More positively, however, **Les Sculptures Sonores** is well illustrated with photographs both archival and informative, drawings and schematics of the instruments, an illustrated discography, and a CD with an interesting selection of recordings long out-of-print and unavailable. It is informative, lively and inspiring reading. (*Soundworld Publishing, 10 Baddow Road, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 0DG, England*) **R**



# the usual turmoil

## Gagaku, cockroaches and bees...**Declan O'Driscoll** talks to koto player, improvisor and composer, **Miya Masaoka**

The koto is a visual wonder. 21 strings over two pieces of wood (shaped like a coffin); bridge like a human spine. It has presence. When it is played by Miya Masaoka (born 1958) sound and movement combine as she reaches across its length, scrapes a string, strokes its underside with a ball or bows it. A choreography that is her thought process, each sound a careful decision, each action a thought. The possibilities, already vast, are extended further by the technology created for her at STEIM in Amsterdam. Just played notes return, percussive effects created on the hollow body of the koto are sampled to build a dark, rumbling layer.

A committed political activist and resident of San Francisco, Masaoka began studying koto in her twenties, having already spent four years working in a Mack Trucks assembly plant where, apart from working on the line, she was a shop steward. After receiving a degree in music at Mills College (among her tutors were Willie Winant, Alvin Curran and David Tudor) she worked for two years as artistic director of a music workshop for homeless people. Through meetings with Henry Kaiser, Lisle Ellis and Larry Ochs she began to find her way into the San Francisco improvising community and eventually became recognised there, and beyond, as a player of great imaginative depth, with an explorer's urge to push towards new territory that would lead to her playing with, among others, Mark Dresser, Ikue Mori, Susie Ibarra, Cecil Taylor, George Lewis, Pharoah Sanders, John Zorn and Jon Rose.

*How important has your training in gagaku music been to the development of your particular approach to music and to your development of a particular sound?*

### third eye

**MM** Well, I studied gagaku music and was director of the San Francisco Gagaku Society for eight years and during that time our master teacher was Togi Suenobu, who traces his lineage in gagaku music for more than one thousand years in the Japanese imperial court family. For me it's been a big source of inspiration for how to approach music and also conducting, because in gagaku conducting you use your four limbs. In gagaku there's also a lot of importance for each sound event, so if you hit a drum nothing else happens for a while, so there's lots of space and silence between events and the sense of rhythm is not typical western rhythm because it goes by so slowly. It's really the maximum amount of impact for the minimum amount of sound. There's also a very spiritual quality in gagaku where there are certain pieces that if you play 108 times your third eye opens up. There are certain mystical elements

that are associated with gagaku music that for me are very intriguing and have kept me wanting to learn more.

*At some point you obviously became aware of improvised music and the possibilities beyond the formal training. Were you at all daunted by the idea of improvising on the koto?*

## daunting prospect

**MM** The prospect was daunting maybe in a couple of different ways because I started doing this almost 10 years ago and at the time I didn't know of any improvisors on the koto. My teacher almost threatened to take away some of my credentials in the traditional koto when she found out I was doing things on my own. She became very threatened and since she's older, very traditional, it was not a gracious kind of experience. It was difficult because it was just not done. Now it's very different, there are Japanese kotoists who are improvising, but before people just weren't doing it. It wasn't something that was considered good to do.

*What about the musicians that you began to work with, were they accepting of the prospect of accommodating a koto player?*

**MM** Among American musicians, one of the first that I played with was Henry Kaiser and he introduced me to a lot of musicians who were improvising. Larry Ochs was also one of the players that introduced me to lots of people. I think the improvising community really welcomed new sounds, new instruments.

*In the liner notes of the CD* ***The Usual Turmoil*** *(Music And Arts, 1997), your duo partner George Lewis is quoted as saying that you like "to have things kind of short and really aphoristic." I wonder what you think of that comment?*

**MM** Well, he could also take that comment back! I mean I can also play the same note over and over again for half an hour, and certainly on my first record there are pieces that last 15 minutes with really very minimal material. There is a genre where you move quickly from one sound area to another, so depending on your particular feeling at the moment you might do things very quickly and jump from certain sound areas to other sound areas, and at other times things will evolve slowly, so I think I do that as well. I'll nail him, I'll get him back!

*On the score for 'Topaz Reflection', recorded on your solo CD* ***Compositions/Improvisations*** *(Asian Improv Arts, 1993), you have the instruction "use space throughout". I'm wondering if the use of space is an element you like to bring to improvising situations, or what do you feel you do bring?*

**MM** Hopefully something that enhances what's happening. I personally like things to be unpredictable. I would like that my contributions be unpredictable so there's times when silence is a big part of the music and others when there is absolutely no silence and there's just sound, sound, sound — layers upon each other. So I prefer to be in flux about how to approach silence. I would say that it happens sometimes but I wouldn't want it to happen all the time.

## marginalised

*On reading about you, it's clear that you are concerned about the situation and condition of marginalised people. Do you think music can play a role in bringing about social change?*

**MM** I like to think so. I want to be an optimist, if anything, in society. All of my relatives were in Japanese concentration camps [in America] during the war and that had some kind of impact on our community. Also, when my parents were looking for a home to buy in the 60s they were only allowed to buy them in certain areas and couldn't buy them in areas that were just meant to be white neighbourhoods. This was not so long ago, this was the 1960s when things were supposed to be liberated. So those kind of things shape your psyche and give you more sympathy for other groups that are also marginalised. I'd like to think I'm not obsessed about race or gender or any of those things, I have enough of my own neuroses! But it's definitely a factor.

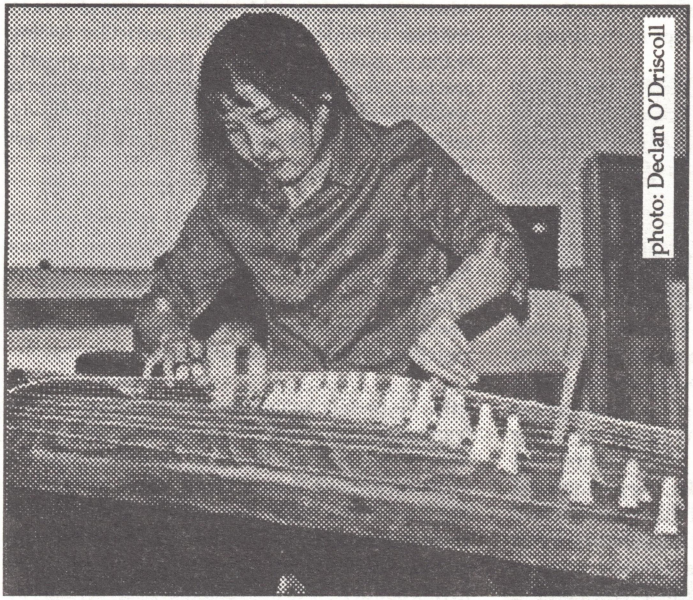


photo: Declan O'Driscoll

*Do you think music can play a role in inducing people to think about these issues ?*

**MM** Well probably a lot of the time it doesn't but that's the way it goes. But I think if people are able to open their minds to different kinds of music, maybe they can open their minds to different social structures and the way society is formulated, or open their minds to other ideas.

## spiny legs & big antennae

*To change the subject somewhat. You've used insects in a number of projects, can you elucidate your interest in insects?*

**MM** I've always been a sucker for powerful images and sounds, whether it's from an instrument or the environment, and I've also been influenced by butoh, the avant-garde Japanese dance form. There's a piece I've done called 'Ritual With Hissing Madagascar Cockroaches' where I lie naked on a table and giant cockroaches crawl on me freely, and I have laser beams going over me and when they trespass and break the laser beam it triggers their own sound and it's very amplified. The natural hissing of a cockroach is like *sssshsks*, it sounds like white noise, and when it's amplified and layered it can be very effective in terms of an electronic sound. In the background there's a large video screen of the close-up of these cockroaches. They have spiny legs and big antennae and they look very prehistoric. It's also the extension of butoh which is where the movement and the emotions are very internalised. They're not readily apparent to the viewer, so I'm lying completely passive and still on a table with the cockroaches moving over me. It's a very strong image. It's really more like performance art, I would say, than an audio piece.

*You've also used bees.*

**MM** I've worked with bees for years, and this November I'm going to be working with three thousand bees on stage with a computer programme that will morph between the buzzing of the bees and different buzzing techniques that I have developed on the koto. There will be speakers around the audience so the sound of the bees will be for them a very dynamic sound.

*You have composed two pieces for the Masaoka Orchestra which you conduct rather than play in. Can you explain the organisational principle behind the piece 'What's The Difference Between Stripping And Playing The Violin?' (see* ***What's The Difference Between Stripping And Playing The Violin?****, Victo 1995)*

**MM** That piece is meant to work with different configurations within the group. It's a very large ensemble with a small contingent of Asian musicians, a quasi-string quartet, two bass players, two drummers, saxophones, an Iranian musician using different Iranian tunings and electronic

musicians who are creating different sound waves. I'm doing conducting based on the gagaku conducting, but I've added different movements to symbolise ways to edit between fast edit, short edit, wave forms, volume gain, etc. So that was just experimenting with some conducting ideas and also working with modular cyclic forms.

*What about the actual score that was presented to the musicians?*

**MM** It was gigantic. It was about four feet by three feet and it had to be held up by a number of stands, and that way they would never have to do any page turns.

*You've also recorded the composition '24,000 Years Is Forever' (see **What's The Difference Between Stripping And Playing The Violin?**).*

**MM** 24,000 years is the time it takes plutonium to start to disintegrate and was dedicated to the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. My relatives are from Hiroshima. That piece is for a large ensemble but uses a more traditional score.

*Are there some ongoing projects that you're involved with at the moment?*

**MM** I'll be playing in Europe and New York in a trio with Reggie Workman and Gerry Hemingway. There's also a new configuration I've been working with, with an ambient guitarist, g e stinson from LA, and the drummer Greg Bendian, and another group Maybe Monday with Fred Frith and Larry Ochs. Fred Frith is one of my great dreams to play with. There's a CD coming out pretty soon. **R**

**SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY**

**Compositions/Improvisations** (solo koto) (Asian Improv Arts AIR 014 CD, 1993); **Monk's Japanese Folk Song** (w Reggie Workman & Andrew Cyrille) (Dizim 4104 CD); **Crepuscular Music** (w Tom Nunn & Gino Robair) (Rastascan BRD030 CD, 1995); **What's The Difference Between Stripping & Playing The Violin?** (Masaoka Orchestra) (Victo CD058 1995); **The Usual Turmoil** (w George Lewis) (Music And Arts CD-1023 CD, 1997)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# film score

**John Zorn**
*Filmworks III (1990-95)* (Tzadik 7309 CD)

Currently running to eight volumes, John Zorn's **Filmworks** series aims to present, in rough chronology, all of his compositions for film. For a man known sometimes to consume up to four movies per day, involvement with film music would seem a natural step. Keeping pace with his multi-faceted work is an increasingly costly affair, so any listener happy enough to settle for occasional snapshots should find **Filmworks III** an ideal point of entry to this particular strand. Of principal interest to most will be the debut recordings by what later became the Masada Quartet. On the soundtrack to *The Thieves*, they can be heard playing noirish jazz, an open homage to Miles Davis' work for Louis Malle's *Lift To The Scaffold*. Zorn is not, however, engaged in pastiche, adding trademark alto sax screams, a quirky recording debut as a pianist and a cameo for Robert Quine's noisy surf guitar to the mix. This must have been some film! Many tracks appear fragmentary and underdeveloped, making an awareness of the functionality of music in cinema helpful. Rounding out the volume are the original genre-hopping and jump-cutting cues from the Japanese cartoon *Cynical Hysterie Hour*, a delightful duet (*Hollywood Hotel*) with Marc Ribot, and 30 one-minute miniatures for Weiden & Kennedy TV commercials directed by such luminaries as Godard, Cronenberg and Nykvist. Whatever the situational challenge, Zorn tackles it with aplomb, leaving an inimitable thumbprint on the work.
**Fred Grand**

**Bernard Herrmann**
*Vertigo* (Varese Sarabande VSD-5600, 1995 CD); *Psycho* (Varese Sarabande VSD-5765, 1996 CD)
Bernard Herrmann's (1911-1976) refusal to compromise was legendary, but produced some highly individual scores, particularly for Alfred Hitchcock. **Vertigo** (1958) and **Psycho** (1960) rank among the composer's finest achievements. These two new recordings are performed by the estimable Royal Scottish National Orchestra, conducted by Joel McNeely, also a film composer. Sound quality is superb, close miking revealing every timbral nuance of these sumptuous orchestrations.

Since disturbed, obsessive mentalities fester at the core of these narratives, Herrmann was able to bring a modernist sensibility to both scores without drawing undue attention to their dissonant elements; the notorious shower scene ('The Murder') in **Psycho** being an obvious exception where savage atonal writing clearly matches the visuals. However, without

the visuals and dialogue one can fully appreciate the detail in this often audacious scoring.

In the case of **Vertigo** — more to do with obsessive desire than straightforward love — any dissonance is leavened with wistful post-romanticism of a Wagnerian and Mahlerian stature, attaining its first peak at the precise moment (the editing is sublime) when Scottie and Madeleine avoid eye contact ('Madeleine's First Appearance'). 'Prelude And Rooftop' is an imposing opener, becoming breathtakingly more agitated to reinforce the vertiginous action.

This is the first complete recording of **Psycho**, Bernard Herrmann's hour-long, strings-only score. A work of great emotional sensitivity, economy and timbral subtlety, its atmospherics are largely based on short repeated motives which probe the despair, guilt, sexual repression and tragedy lurking beneath the visual suspense and horror. A sombre masterwork. **R**
**Chris Blackford**

# From The Diary Of A Meta-percussionist
## Gino Robair

In 1994, I decided to expand my vocabulary as an improvisor; in particular, away from the drummerly styles that develop around the standard drum kit. To do this, I took the approach that any instrument and sound is fair game. In the hands of a percussionist everything becomes 'percussion', and in a sense he or she ceases being a 'percussionist'.

But rather than take the usual route where new and exotic techniques are created based on specific instruments and playing situations, I went in the opposite direction: I embraced improvised performance as a totality. This included re-examining my reliance on musical instruments in general. How far could I take this? Is it possible to arrive at a gig without musical instruments and still sustain a complete solo performance?

**Goal 1**: To be able to make music at any time and in any situation, without the aid of specialized tools.

**Suggestion 1**: Test the extremes of the performance situation. Begin by not preparing for the gig (physically or mentally); just show up and play.

**Suggestion 2**: Allow yourself to be in the moment, without regard to past moments. Begin by leaving your instruments at home.

**First Test**: Birmingham, Alabama. After being met at the airport by LaDonna Smith, I was rushed to the discotheque where the first evening of the Birmingham Improvised Music festival was only minutes away from beginning. As is customary, the drums that were promised had not arrived by showtime, and the closest thing to a percussion instrument I could find (not a single trash can in sight) was an upright bass. Using a bow was too obvious: the bass became a large, wooden slit drum, of sorts, with four handy strings. By this time, I had already been including site-specific items in my performances, along with assorted found objects that I carried with me for preparing drums. In the interest of exploring a state of total improvisation, over the course of a few months I began removing drums from my setup and leaving more things up to chance. This was the first time everything stayed home.

photo: Elise Ryerson

**Results**: Besides being noted as a bass player in the Birmingham papers, the music (a trio setting) was satisfying. The music seemed to flow effortlessly. As for an instrument, the bass makes a mighty fine drum when played with mallets, hands, and feet (cf. Barry Guy and John Edwards).

## anti-drummer

As a young composer and instrumentalist, I was drawn toward creative music with an emphasis on complexity. As a percussionist in particular, the challenge was in the precise execution of rhythms of greater and greater difficulty. The escalation of "statistical density" (as Frank Zappa put it) continued to interest me throughout my formal studies to the point where the only logical next step was into free improvisation — the edge nearest the unknown.

However, it wasn't just the complexity of

sounds and rhythms that fascinated me, but the "density" of the improvising experience. I've found that the only way for me to proceed is to remove any assemblance of comfort. In this case, by stripping away the instruments themselves and ultimately relinquishing control over the performance entirely.

**I find that my playing is influenced more by other instruments and media than by drummers or percussionists. In particular, the Abstract Expressionists, Fluxus, and Marcel Duchamp's "ready mades" are probably most recognizable in my approach.**

On one level, this means allowing instruments to complete their natural cycle of decay. That includes using drum heads and sticks until they become completely unusable — well beyond the initial breaking point. The practical result is that I may reach for a familiar sound, only to find that it's altered in some gross way that makes it a challenge to use musically.

Another level is to put the control of the instruments into the hands of someone else. Although it's not unusual for a touring drummer to ask the concert promoter to provide a drum set, the reality of the situation is that no two sets are alike, and often the instruments secured are either in poor shape, incomplete, or both. Rather than stress over this dilemma, I decided to use it as an invitation and challenge to explore an ever-changing set of variables. It also frees me from the somewhat arbitrary configuration of sounds that a typical drum set provides.

Control is further removed by making the instruments themselves unstable in some way. I do this both with preparations and with motorized implements. The unpredictability of motorized tools left running and placed under a pile of objects is useful both as an ostinato (in the background) and as a duet partner (in the foreground).

In the process of attaining a complete state of anti-drumming, I strenuously avoid putting the stick to the skin in a conventional way. This allows me to concentrate on playing the snare drum with an EBow or creating a 'faux daxophone' by bowing cymbals and sticks against the rim of a drum.

**Goal 2**: Relinquish control over the performance situation.

**Suggestion 3**: Dare to fail; go out on a limb. Focus on the process of improvisation and the long-term goals of developing the craft rather than the immediate gratification of a 'good gig'.

**First Test**: Oakland, CA. Pot-Luck Percussion Evening. For a solo performance at the East Bay Creative Music Festival, the audience is invited (via flyers and e-mailings) to provide the 'instruments' for the performance. The results include a piezo pickup encased within clear Jell-O in a baking tin; a guitar amp; an unused condom; and water. Rusty metals and other debris complete the scene.

**Results**: Piezos and Jell-O don't mix. The electronics crap out, but the performance goes well, primarily because it was in a small, quiet venue and the audience was close enough to see and hear the unamplified Jell-O. As I get further away from playing drums in a standard manner, I find that smaller performance spaces, where the audience can be close to the action, are preferable to auditoriums and clubs that require amplification.

This particular performance reminded me of **Suggestion 5** (Don't obsess about the results of an improvisation; evaluate what did and didn't work — if you must — then move on) and **Suggestion 9** (Avoid self-criticism during the act of music making: Create music in the moment, then reflect on it when you're done). The focus required to get the job done on this particular evening didn't allow me to take notice of what actually happened musically. I took that as a good sign.

## meta-percussion

I feel as if I'm going backward in my development as a 'drummer'. Perhaps, eventually, I will arrive at the point where I can no longer hold the sticks properly or even keep a simple beat, though I'll have the accumulated

memory of the journey to and from being a drummer.

I find that my playing is influenced more by other instruments and media than by drummers or percussionists. In particular, the Abstract Expressionists, Fluxus, and Marcel Duchamp's "ready mades" are probably most recognizable in my approach. Musicians such as Keith Rowe, Fred Frith, Hans Reichel, Myles Boisen, Tim Perkis, and John Butcher, who have worked beyond the confines of their instruments and in some cases into anti-techniques, are also important sources of inspiration.

**Goal 3**: To find the hidden voices within any object.

**Suggestion 4**: A bow can be used on just about anything. Almost anything can be used as a bow (given enough rosin).

Questions for evaluating the musical potential of an object during a performance.

Can it be:
Bowed?
Struck?
Blown into?
Rubbed (fricative)?
Swung around?
Prepared or modified temporarily?
Broken? (is it okay to break it?)

**Test 1**: San Francisco, CA. Tehama Alley Clit Stop: I am under the spell of styrofoam, primarily for its sound, but also for its resonant qualities, and because it's cheap and easy to find (except in Berkeley, where it's banned). My performance kit has been reduced to a shopping bag full of styrofoam (including Italian plates secured with the help of Francesco Martinelli), cotton balls, an assortment of candles and empty tea tins, a metal door from a hot-water heater, two sampling CDs, and a bass bow (I filled the bag when my garage flooded for the umpteenth time; it ended up in my van for safe keeping, and finally at this gig).

One thing about traditional percussion instruments is that many of them cannot play a sustained tone without repeated strikings. So historically, the delineation of time and rhythm is the drummer's main role. The bow releases the percussionist from the tyranny of rhythm. Although on the microlevel, the fricative action of a bow drawn across a cymbal is rhythmic (e.g. if you slow down a recording of a bowed object,

you begin to hear the hair catching the object successively), at the macrolevel the bowed instrument can transcend its mundane existence as a mere percussive device.

**Results:** The tea tins and candles were handed out to the audience who proceeded to accompany me with rhythm (tapping the tins) and pyrotechnics. CDs work well as a faux daxophone (bowed over the edge of a table) due in large part to their elasticity; you can almost bend them in half with the bow and they still sound great. Cotton burns; candles break and melt; tin cans can be bent and crushed; a bag can be torn and wadded up into a ball; compact discs snap in half. I go home with empty hands. **R**

*Gino Robair's latest CD is* ***Plates, Blocks, Cups, & Hair*** *(Limited Sedition 013), a solo work for bowed styrofoam. Available from Rastascan Records, P.O. Box 3073, San Leandro, CA 94578-3073, USA.*

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# hybrid haven

**Chris Blackford** considers the alliance of classical music and jazz

Classical music and jazz have never been the happiest of bedfellows — or so the critics tell us. Attempts to marry the two traditions have been routinely regarded with suspicion, if not downright contempt. Purist jazz critics, who have probably been most vociferous in their disapproval, have tended to dismiss the jazz 'perpetrators' of such hybrid works (the term "third stream" was coined by 1950s proponent Gunter Schuller) as pretentious and pompous, their classical counterparts viewed as superficial, voguish dabblers. As a result, the latter's works rarely appear in jazz histories, though if one bothers to listen with an unprejudiced ear, one can discover a small number of ambitious pieces which have significantly extended the jazz language and, moreover, point to an important, if undervalued, tradition in eclectic composition. This review article intends to look at a few of these works.

The marriage of jazz and classical music certainly can't be dismissed as a frippery, for its roots, like jazz itself, lie in the ragtime of late 19th century America, an eclectic piano music where, as jazz historian Joachim E Berendt observes: "Everything relevant to that time can be found... from Chopin and, most of all, Liszt, to marches and polkas" (*The Jazz Book*, 1984).

Charles Ives

**Charles Ives**, the hugely important American pioneer, and part-time ragtime pianist at Poli's vaudeville house in New Haven, saw nothing problematic in bringing ragtime into many of his experimental chamber and orchestral works. 1902-4 saw the completion of *Four Ragtime Dances* (see Koch International Classics 7025 CD), scored for oboe, alto saxophone, bassoon, trumpets, trombones, strings, piano and percussion. Although possibly the earliest work in this hybrid tradition (Stravinsky's *Rag-time* would follow in 1918), Ives already achieves a very impressive coherence between the idioms, fusing ragtime's syncopated melodies (based here on three hymn tunes) with his budding polyrhythmic and polytonal language. In typical Ivesian style, the pieces maintain a compelling energy, unexpectedly lurching from genteel romanticism to rambunctious modernism in the blink of an eye. Two scherzo sections of the *Piano Sonata No.1* (1901-9) (see Collins Classics 1107-2 CD) are further examples of Ives' highly inventive harmonic and rhythmic extensions of ragtime.

By the 1920s, it had become fashionable for experimental composers to turn to the vibrant rhythms of jazz to invigorate diatonic harmony, though some like Milhaud, Poulenc and Auric (members of the French group Les Six), primarily used this new "vernacular form" to satirize romanticism and earlier periods of the European tradition. Yet, Americans George Gershwin and **Aaron Copland**, following the example of Ives, worked without irony to construct a versatile national music which could accommodate popular idioms.

In Copland's case, this led to the *Concerto For Piano And Orchestra* of 1926 (see **Aaron Copland — The Modernist** RCA Victor Red Seal 09026 685412 CD), his early and still underrated work (certainly less well known than Gershwin's concertos of the 1920s) which draws heavily on jazz for its rhythmic drive. The composer said he was "intrigued" by jazz rhythms "not for superficial

effects, but for use in larger forms, with unconventional harmonies." Most evident in the second movement where the piano's staccato phrasing — a kind of dissonant blend of ragtime and New Orleans — is counterposed by sharp surges of brass and strings, emphasizing an angular, polyrhythmic dance-like momentum. The slower first movement is based on a simple, yet affecting, balladic bluesy theme, expanded by Copland's exquisite, typically spacious, "lean-grand" strings. Michael Tilson Thomas and San Francisco Symphony, with pianist Garrick Ohlsson, remind us that this once controversial work still hasn't lost any of its dramatic fizz. Jazz orchestration of this complexity and daring wouldn't be heard again for about another 20 years.

Dedicated to jazz clarinettist Woody Herman, and composed for his band, *Ebony Concerto* (1945) is **Igor Stravinsky**'s most significant jazz-inspired work: though, interestingly, you won't find reference to it in the Woody Herman entries in the principal jazz encyclopedias. Divided into three short movements for clarinet, saxophones, trumpets, trombones, guitar, harp, piano, double bass and percussion, this is an exemplary piece of tightly constructed, highly inventive chamber jazz, anticipating the Charles Mingus chamber groups of the 50s/early 60s and some of the orchestral voicings of the Miles Davis and Gil Evans collaborations, among others.

Propelled by Stravinsky's familiar stabbing woodwinds, *Ebony Concerto* impresses with its elegance and economy — the general gaiety belying the work's structural complexity. Swift changes in tempo and instrumental colour, including gorgeous, moodily dissonant chords, and a spirited dialogue between the legato melodic lines and excitable rhythmic energy, are marvellously conveyed in recordings by Woody Herman and His Orchestra (seemingly not yet available on CD), and Benny Goodman and Columbia Jazz Band, here conducted by Stravinsky on **Benny Goodman Collector's Edition** (Sony/Columbia 42227 CD).

Around the same time as *Ebony Concerto*, leading US big band conductor, composer and arranger, **Stan Kenton**, was promoting his own and Pete Rugolo's "progressive jazz". The huge success of this accessible large-scale Swing with elements from the romantic region of European classical music — see **The Very Best Of Stan Kenton** (Empress RAJCD 906 CD) — paved the way for his more ambitious late 40s/early 50s "Innovations in Modern Music", mostly realised by a massive 40-piece jazz orchestra with sizeable string section.

For this project, Kenton championed the work of US jazz saxophonist, composer and arranger **Bob Graettinger** (1923-1957), and in doing so unleashed upon his audiences some of the most advanced and original jazz influenced pieces ever to see the light of day. Needless to say, Kenton quickly lost the support of most fans, while attracting the scorn of the conservative jazz critics. Graettinger's work for Kenton's orchestra is collected on **City Of Glass** (Capitol Jazz 7243 8 32084 2 5 CD). Where Copland's *Music For A Great City* (1964) suite is primarily a eulogy to New York, scattered with jazz inspired rhythms and brass to suggest its bustling, frenetic ambience, Graettinger's *City Of Glass* (1948) suite evokes a more troubled vision of an unspecified metropolis — much in keeping with the brooding, frequently violent, urban underworld of Hollywood *films noir* of the time. 'Entrance Into The City' and 'The Structures', its two-part first movement, is a turbulent fanfare of searing strings and piercing brass, where swing time makes sudden appearances and vigorous pizzicato seamlessly becomes a delicately plucked guitar. Swing rhythms maintain a lasting presence in 'Dance Before The Mirror', driving the swirl and blaze of mutated big band horns. 'Reflections', the closing movement, signals a neoclassical lyricism, its strings and woodwinds swarm then explode into a final densely textured fanfare with the brass, before melting slowly into an urban darkness.

Each movement of *City Of Glass* is not much longer than a pop single, though brevity requires that each piece quickly attains symphonic proportions. *This Modern World* (not titled as such, and re-ordered here), the other work in short movements, reads like a mini-concerto ('A Horn') plus several intricate pieces for predominantly brass and woodwind ensembles; the adventurous contrapuntal and harmonic scoring still seems

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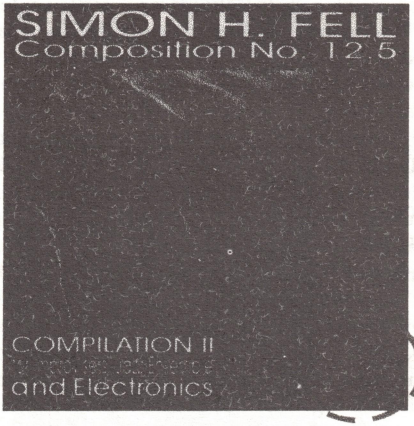


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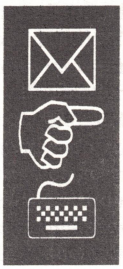

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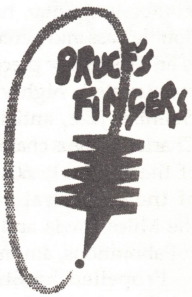
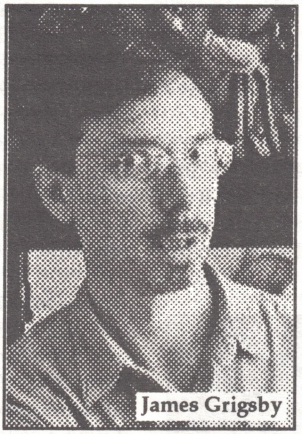


remarkably modern — 'Some Saxophones', 'A Trumpet' and 'A Thought', while for larger forces, wouldn't sound out of place on a Rova Saxophone Quartet CD.

Perhaps the most surprising track on the disc is Graettinger's subversive arrangement of the Matt Dennis & Tom Adair ballad 'Everything Happens To Me'. The charming, comic-romantic lyrics, sung beautifully by June Christy, are given an almost surreal tweak by audacious, yet subtly judged, juxtapositions of neoclassical strings, chamber jazz romanticism and splendidly jarring woodwinds. Another song, 'You Go To My Head', presented in an instrumental version here, finds its trombone theme competing against a tense siren-like brass and woodwind figure, until the latter falls away sharply and the melody emerges in all its delightful, luxuriant warmth.

'Thermopylae', Graettinger's earliest piece (1947) for Kenton, adopts a similar tension and release structure where a wistful theme soars over a formidably dense trumpets and trombones dominated texture; 'Incident In Jazz' unites toe-tapping big band Swing with swooning, stratospheric strings. Then the orchestra's 16-strong string section gathers for the short but powerful 'House Of Strings', its bleak, post-romantic melodic sweep and savage atonality recall Bernard Herrmann's later strings-only score for *Psycho* (1960). It's the only piece here making no reference to jazz.

Given the striking originality of Bob Graettinger's work, one would expect him to be a much celebrated figure in the annals of jazz. Sadly, not so. In fact, I've yet to find a jazz encyclopedia that even allocates him an entry. It seems that the work of this former student of composition at Westlake School of Music in Los Angeles has nowadays become merely an obscure adjunct to the career of Stan Kenton. Although Kenton was



James Grigsby

the prime champion of Graettinger's music, and Graettinger composed and arranged these pieces with the playing styles of Kenton's band members in mind, it really is time to recognise Graettinger in his own right as one of the most important composers in post-war jazz. He certainly deserves to be as highly regarded as say, George Russell.

Bob Graettinger's radical polystylistic soundworld, with its polyphonic density and bracing atonality, while drawing on ideas previously explored by the likes of Ives, Stravinsky, Copland and Schoenberg, still remains truly distinctive. It also anticipates the radical polyphonic density of jazz influenced big bands like Globe Unity Orchestra and London Jazz Composers Orchestra, though Graettinger's music favours notation over improvisation. He died aged only 34, a brilliant young composer tragically robbed of revealing his full potential, but who left some exhilarating compositions.

In the press release for **City Of Mirrors** (Cuneiform Rune 116 CD), American composer and multi-instrumentalist **James Grigsby** cites Bob Graettinger's "astounding stylistic mixes" as the impetus for the expanded line-up of **Motor Totemist Guild** (also see **Rubberneck 26**, page 25), now calling on a pool of 15 for these six 1998 recordings. Of course, in our postmodern 1990s polystylism is a lot less likely to offend critics and audiences than when Graettinger was at it 50 years ago. Nevertheless, Grigsby creates his own astounding stylistic mixes here; astounding because the syntheses of styles (avant-garde classical, avant-rock, jazz, structured improv, etc) are so finely woven that one focuses more on the sumptuous instrumental colour and poly-rhythmic inventiveness than on the fleet idiomatic interplay. Big band song 'Tower Of London' (Curt Wilson on top form) recalls the murky business of murdered little princes; 'Scarfnet' traverses tortuous Zappaesque curlicues with vocalist Emily Hay closer to Dagmar Krause than June Christy; and lengthy live 'Bixby Slough' showcases the band's improv sensitivity to light, shade and textural intrigue. **R**

# 20th Century Treasures

## Rubberneck Reviews Team select their favourite works of the past century.

**John Cage**, Williams Mix (1952)
issued as part of the set, 25-year Retrospective Concert Of The Music Of John Cage
(Wergo 6247-2 3CDs)

*Williams Mix* was, I believe, the first tape composition to be made in the US. The industry and application necessary are still astounding: it took three people (John Cage, David Tudor and Earle Brown) nine months of editing to produce a piece of little over four minutes. Derived from 500-600 separate sounds, organised first in six sonic categories (city, country, electronic, manually-produced, wind-produced, amplified small sounds), then classed by their attack and decay characteristics. Its score is the full-sized template for editing the fragments. At its New York premiere in 1958 it polarised the audience spectacularly and the Avakian recording made on this occasion is followed by over a minute of sustained booing and bravoing, at times as densely rich as the music itself. And what of the music? Like so much of Cage, it takes care of itself. Non-objective, apparently formless and devoid of development, yet never less than enthralling.

**Chris Atton**

**Einstürzende Neubauten**, Kollaps (1981)
(Zickzack EFA 2517 CD)

When I saw EN support The Birthday Party at London's Lyceum in 1981(?) my eyes were opened to a new world where noise was music, music was noise, and aural alchemy was achieved. A few months later I scored **Kollaps** at an exorbitant price (£6.99!), and even though I was initially unimpressed with a lot of its more subtle experimentation, I grew to love every inch of its mystery, power and humour. The back cover parody of Pink Floyd's **Ummagumma** sleeve shot depicts the band surrounded by their 'instruments' (pneumatic drill, broken guitar, tools, springs, megaphone, etc) in front of the Olympic stadium built for the 1936 Games. The combination of work ethic and avant-garde expression contained in this record has sustained me for years and never fails to inspire me to think, create and listen. Although it's not their best, it was the first I heard and is that rare thing in life: a clanging, discordant epiphany.

**Jim Barker**

**Olivier Messiaen**, Turangalîla-Symphonie (1948)
City Of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra; conductor Simon Rattle
(EMI CDS 7 47463 8 2CDs)

I first encountered Messiaen's music as a teenager during a college 'Music Appreciation' class. The piece was *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste* (1963), and unlike anything I'd heard before: the notion of a composer creating a distinctive soundworld had entered my head — thereafter would become an obsession. *Turangalîla-Symphonie* came later and on a larger scale. 10 movements lasting nearly an hour and 20 minutes, it draws particularly on Messiaen's study of Hindu modes, Balinese gamelan and, of course, birdsong, to produce an epic sound-vision of superhuman joy and transcendent love. Themes are grandiose yet succinct, tone-colours exotic and radiant, energised by an ecstatic rhythmic vigour (Scriabin's visionary *Le Poème de l'extase* (1907) and *Prometheus* (1908-10) are obvious precursors). *Turangalîla* shows that 'difficult music' can also be overtly emotional. I saw CBSO and Simon Rattle perform it in 1991, and this remains my most emotionally intense and exhilarating concert experience.

**Chris Blackford**

**Christian Wolff**, Burdocks (1972)
(Wergo 60063 LP)

*Burdocks* is for me one of the unsung masterpieces of American Experimentalism. Written by perhaps the least well known of the 'New York School' and first performed by the Scratch Orchestra in 1971. There's only one commercial recording of this piece and I've never heard it. This doesn't matter; *Burdocks*' very nature denies the definitive performance. It consists of 10 sections: all or a selection can be played in any order or combination by 'orchestras' of varying sizes. Instrumentation is not specified and musical material is often left up to the performer; the notation, either through instruction or suggestion, determines how the piece is performed. Wolff's notation is not as pretty as much of Cage's or Cardew's work, but the manner of its writing encourages a creative dialogue between performer and composer absent in similar music. Performances often mix deadly seriousness with anarchic humour and theatrics, but it's the careful balance of formality and freedom in the score which allows apparently contradictory extremes to sit together without incongruity.

**Bruce Coates**

**Captain Beefheart & His Magic Band**, Trout Mask Replica (1969)
(Warner Bros 759927-196-2 CD)

30 years after the fact, this album still stands as one of the most original and unusual artefacts conceived during a particularly fertile era in American popular music: polyphonic, polyrhythmic, with its fractured feel built from a rhythmic sense, it's a perennial source of inspiration for both avant-garde and out-rock musicians. Though Beefheart's voice, lyrics and persona dominated the mix — and his claim of sole authorship notwithstanding — the music was composed (i.e. put together according to aesthetical principles) by a group effort, mostly by the hard work and ingenuity of legendary drummer John French (aka Drumbo) and guitarist Bill Harkleroad. Considered too weird in its time — with its mix of raw Delta blues, the jazz influence of Coleman, Dolphy and Kirk, and the vivid, pictorial nature of the texts — **Trout Mask Replica**, when compared to today's mainstream, is just as weird.

**Giuseppe Colli**

**Lennie Tristano**, 'Intuition' & 'Digression' from Crosscurrents (1949); CD reissue titled Intuition (Blue Note BNTE 527712 CD)

'Intuition' and 'Digression' are the first recorded examples of group free improvisation. In 1949, Ornette Coleman was a struggling r 'n' b musician, Joe Harriott was playing in dance bands in Jamaica and Jimmy Giuffre was a Herdsman. Evan Parker was five.

Lennie Tristano had a reputation as a virtuoso pianist, jazz teacher and theorist. A tight-knit group of his pupils comprised this group: Lee Konitz, Warne Marsh, Billy Bauer, Arnold Fishkin and Denzil Best. And he was not afraid to experiment. For these tracks, he instructed his group to start playing with none of the accepted jazz structures — no pre-set chord sequence, melody, key centre, soloists or duration. The results are endlessly fascinating; melodic and short (less than six minutes in total). Tristano is clearly the leader, but the group ethic prevails. This is certainly *not* "playing without memory"; the players strive to harmonise with each other wherever possible. These were the tentative opening shots of a revolution.

**John Eyles**

**Spontaneous Music Ensemble**, Karyobin (1968)
(Chronoscope CPE2001-2 CD)

**Karyobin** is a gem from 1968. Look at the line-up. The impeccable Evan Parker (saxes), already showing the trademarks of his emerging virtuosity and split second reflexes. Derek Bailey (guitar) beginning to carve a new language from the vocabulary of the jazz and function musician of

only a few years previous. Kenny Wheeler (trumpet), the most conventional player here yet with a fluidity of invention that does full justice to the company he keeps. Dave Holland, shortly to leave for the States and Miles Davis, underpinning the proceedings with his quicksilver lyrical bass. And, of course, the group's convenor the late great John Stevens (drums), who committed himself to the pursuit of freedom and beauty in the darkest corners. This is jazz on the cusp of free improvisation, and it is the spirit of collectivity and the ascendance of spontaneity over tradition that makes it such a landmark.
**Gus Garside**

**Joe McPhee**, Topology (1981)
(hatART 6027 CD)
A pivotal record in my development as a listener, this 1981 recording ended an obsessive fixation solely with free jazz by opening my ears to the possibilities of non-idiomatic improvisation, composition and electroacoustics. There was of course still enough visceral blowing on the disc to satisfy on that level, though I now began to appreciate how graphic notation can bring coherent form to improvisation. A strikingly variegated palette of sounds and emotions are employed by a judiciously assembled cast of multinational improvisors including Irène Schweizer, Radu Malfatti, Pierre Favre and André Jaume. Many startling juxtapositions stand out — McPhee's graceful themes floating above Raymond Boni's industrial-strength guitar, screaming post-Ayler overtones underpinned by delicately bowed strings and an overall mood of contemplative introspection continually stalked by terrifyingly abrasive collective improvisation. It sounds as bold and fresh today as I imagine it always will.
**Fred Grand**

**Sun Ra**, 'Dance Of The Cosmo-Aliens' (1978) from Disco 3000 (Saturn CMIJ 78 LP)
Bolstered by the march of science and technology, modernity has often tried to fashion the world and paint visions of the future in its own image. In early 80s sci-fi programmes like Buck Rogers, rare dancehall footage showed discotheques swinging to the sound of rock guitar. However, in 1978, Sun Ra brought back from one of his spaceway travels dance music that really is from the future — from a disco in the year 3000. Technically speaking, it is not a 20th century treasure at all. Alien voices chatter in revelry nearby, as Ra's intergalactic keyboard clusters provide momentum for the bug-eyes on the dance floor. It all sounds just a little spooky, but one listens in wonder to the sounds from a distant planet — as if we've been afforded a rare privilege to hear something secret. And only when the Arkestra played Jewish weddings was the dancing more feverish.
**Mark Greenaway**

**Hildegard Westerkamp**, Transformations (1996)
(Empreintes Digitales IMED 9631 CD)
Hildegard Westerkamp is famous for her soundwalks — audio recordings documenting a particular place at a particular time of day. Found material — out of which, using studio-based manipulations, she fashions a unique sonic event. Thus, the environment is reshaped, subjectivised, revealed anew. This extraordinary CD contains several examples of her work.

'Kits Beach Soundwalk' begins with a description of what we can already hear: waves lapping in the foreground, bird calls, background city roar. Then Westerkamp demonstrates some of her filtering and equalising techniques. By employing several ellipses, literal description is transformed into one dream narrative after another, each illustrated with variations on the multiple, random clicking noises made by barnacles. Eventually, the city is allowed to return (in the guise of a flapping, flailing, playful monster).

Westerkamp reveals the subtle, interactive music in the hidden or unheeded sounds which surround us. She has changed the way I listen to music, and what I consider music to be.
**Brian Marley**

**Albert Ayler & Don Cherry**, 'Ghosts' from Vibrations (1964) (Freedom FCD 41000 CD)
Early 80s and the post-punk turmoil in rock music had left me floundering. A little of it still made sense but I was bereft. A music lover with little or no music to love. My bent was against all mainstreams and somehow the notion of free jazz and improvised music took hold as a possible source of contentious wonders. Risks had to be taken. What sort of music does Albert Ayler play? Don Cherry, I've heard of him. I'll chance it. **Vibrations**. First track 'Ghosts', one of two versions on the record. It was the second, longer take that set me reeling, embarrassed almost by its effusion. The theme was curious, stately but jagged, Ayler and Cherry in almost-unison. Then the tenor solo. A moment of astonishment. A declamatory barked anguish that seemed, simultaneously, tilted towards celebration. Even now, having heard Brötzmann, Wright, Gayle, etc, it still strikes me as unique in its honesty, its naked human need to communicate. The truth was marching in.
**Declan O'Driscoll**

**Sun Ra**, The Magic City (1965)
(Evidence CD ECD 22069-2 CD)
As someone who came to Ra after childhood interest in Egyptology and space travel(!) I got this on its 1976 vinyl reissue; it's stayed a firm favourite. You could argue that this 27-minute marathon is too 'stand-alone' in Ra's galactic repertoire to qualify as epoch-making, but it's got the lot. Mostly improvised, it opens with solo piano (slightly Bartok), juxtaposing: wild electric clavioline with arco bass (the incomparable Ronnie Boykins); snappy, echoed drum breaks, twittering woodwinds, droning bass clarinet. As the intensity builds, a collective wail sets off several minutes of extraordinary reed duos and solos before the finale. In 1965, it was hard to find, wrongly given as 1960, and utterly radical. In retrospect, it prefigures so much: orchestration of collective passages by minimal directions, individual virtuosity, new textures, studio technology. All Ra's pieces were paragraphs of one cosmic newspaper, he liked to say: this is from the front page. R
**Gerard F Tierney**

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# Prime cuts

**Telectu/Louis Sclavis/Jac Berrocal**, Jazz Off Multimedia (Ananana Non Series non001 CD)
**Reto Senn/John Wolf Brennan/Margrit Rieben**, Minute Age (For 4 Ears CD 1030 CD)
**Peter Brötzmann/Peter Friis Nielsen/Peeter Uuskyla**, Noise Of Wings (Slask SLACD 019 CD)

1995: two Frenchmen on stage with two Portuguese electronics players/multi-instrumentalists. The latter are perhaps more interesting on 'conventional' instruments, especially the work on and in the piano. Berrocal, one of those "shouldn't I know more about him?" players, is effective, if a little sedate. Sclavis goes through a few routines, e.g. circular breathing on soprano, but his bass clarinet is always rewarding. A very long first track is followed without a perceptible pause by the first of a number of shorter ones, the last of which fades slowly away; overall, a rather puzzling set. I get the impression this was a first encounter: the record company doesn't seem much clearer.

1997: a Swiss recording from a variety of venues (but not, I think, in front of an audience). Reedman Senn has a folk background and occasionally recalls countryman Hans Koch. Brennan (another of those "shouldn't I..." players) is on keyboards. Rieben makes up a trio that deliberately aims for non-idiomatic improvising. Someone should tell them that 'comprovisation' is not a new word. Someone might also have a word about the silly titles. There's a lot on offer, though, and some unusual textures: Senn uses tarogato and bass clarinet, and it's nice when Brennan whips out a melodica. Rieben is the winner though: she has not only a saw but a theremin...

1999: the indefatigable Mr B goes into the studio with electric bass (old compadre Peter Friis Nielsen) and drums (Peeter Uuskyla); the latter, also the producer, has worked with Biggi Vinkeloe and recently released a solo CD. His loose style, and the bubbly, not too boomy, bass sound create an interesting stew for the reeds. It's not particularly like Last Exit minus a guitar, and it's interesting to hear the leader in this context, as he's so often recently gone for a more 'earthy' sound, often with American players. I'd have liked some more of his lower register instruments, but there's some fine tarogato, and striking tenor on the final piece, especially an unaccompanied cadenza that links its two sections. Nothing earth-shatteringly new, but good stuff nonetheless. (*Ananana, P.O. Box 21671, 1137 Lisboa Codex, Portugal / For 4 Ears, Steinechtweg 16, CH-4452 Itingen, Switzerland / Slask Records, Box 27, SE-430 84 Styrsö, Sweden*)
**Gerard F Tierney**

**Paul Plimley Trio**, Safecrackers (Victo cd066 CD)
**Gianni Gebbia/Garth Powell/Damon Smith**, People In Motion (Rastascan 044 CD)
**Spunk**, det enneste jeg at det ikke er en støvsuger (Rune Grammofon 2010 CD)
**Chamaeleo Vulgaris**, Ouverture Facile (Leo Lab 061 CD)

Steering an individual path between the percussive attack of Cecil Taylor and the harmonic adventures of Paul Bley, Canadian pianist Plimley has emerged in recent years as a talent to watch. This new studio recording ranks with his very best work, and in developing his sometimes underplayed lyrical and introspective side, it stands distinct. New drummer Scott Amendola whips up a quiet-storm with brushes and long-time bass partner Lisle Ellis is as reassuringly robust as ever. The 13 relatively short pieces span a broad range and are tackled with customary vigour, sparks flying in all directions during the hotter sections. Plimley can only enhance his reputation with music of this calibre.

Sicilian alto saxophonist Gianni Gebbia is a post-Zorn player who can move from radical explorations of the saxophone as noise-generator to fluid jazz-lines in an instant. His equally talented Californian collaborators contribute a wealth of unusual angles, playing not just bass and drums but an arsenal of instruments including berimbau and whirlophone. Add Gebbia's game-calls

(mallard, no less!) and you have non-retro free jazz full of quirky ideas and fresh sounds.

Norwegian all-female quartet Spunk straddle the borders of non-idiomatic improvisation, electroacoustic music and new composition. The disc's jarring opener explores extremes of pitch and timbre and is shocking in its audacity. Elsewhere, echoes of sources as disparate as The Residents' surreal fantasias, Kaffe Matthews' processed violin, Scelsi's dissonant orchestral drones, and Bjork's playfully idiosyncratic voice can be traced. Occasional longueurs can be forgiven on this bold, unsettling and beautifully presented disc.

French collective Chamaeleo Vulgaris offer a dark improvised soundscape which never settles in one place for very long. The juxtaposition of free jazz saxophone and percussion with electronics and Borbetomagus-like feedback guitar gives a music rich in detail. A willingness to use noise as musical syntax, be it the many long periods of near silence or the violent outbreaks of white-noise, demonstrates a forward-looking approach, and despite the bias towards electronics, the acoustic instruments generally retain their voices. All four discs illustrate just what a healthy creative state free jazz and improvised music are in as we move towards the next century. (*Rune Grammofon, Akersgata 7, 0158 Oslo, Norway*)
**Fred Grand**

**Mario Schiano/Giancarlo Schiaffini/Bruno Tommaso**, To Be Continued...
(Discoteca Di Stato DDS 98-1 CD)
**Tuba Trio**, Bad News From Tuba Trio
(Caligola 2028-2 CD)
**Fabio Martini**, Intrio
(Takla 3 CD)
40 years after his first concert, Mario Schiano was invited by the Italian National Sound Archive to reunite with Giancarlo Schiaffini and Bruno Tommaso, both of whom had been members of his Gruppo Romano Free Jazz in the late 60s. Over 30 years of association and shared knowledge (through similar though diverse musical routes) lends this recording a relaxed but uncomplacent air. These three have nothing to prove to each other but plenty to say. There is a terrific sensitivity to equilibrium of sound, the balance of elements. Tommaso acts as an astute fulcrum for the trio, alert to every adjustment. After all the years there is still a searching purpose to their music, Schiano's tone, weightless but plaintive, moves with considered ease among the shifting contours. Schiaffini favours eruptions of sound, his trombone surfacing for blasts of muted disputation. This splendid CD is a tribute to three wonderful musicians and to the musical explorations which began in Europe all those years ago.

Giancarlo Schiaffini is present again as part of the Tuba Trio, this time playing that tuba as well as his more usual trombone. The setting is very different, inquiry and improvisation replaced by the kind of pastiche and quotation, genre-hopping music which is becoming ubiquitous among Italian musicians, here represented by Enzo Rocco who wrote all the compositions. It is sometimes enjoyable but too often it seems restrictive and reductive; the drumming of Ettore Fioravanti tied to playing leaden beats, Schiaffini's considerable talent only occasionally allowed to roam but more often escorted back towards confinement. A track like 'Marabi' — one of four pieces for which the trio is joined by reeds player Eugenio Colombo — seems barely worth their time, its whimsicality soon becoming tiresome. In the end too much of the CD seems inconsequential, a failure to transform the influences they draw on, leaving it all seeming merely conventional.

An utterly separate strand of Italian jazz is represented on Fabio Martini's magnificent CD **Intrio**. This is an unusually 'cool' strain which launches out from the trio music of Jimmy Giuffre to create superbly modulated, restrained but fervent music which appears to happen in slow motion. It's a distinct pleasure to get inside the music to the extent allowed here. It may be languid but there's little sense of calm. Nothing about the music is settled, there's too much tension and self-questioning, a constant shifting of the parameters by bass and drums, the players of which change halfway through. The first pair are excellent on detail, discerning at every move. The second duo adopt a wider sonic reach, are more restless though, just as quick to react and somehow lead Martini towards a slightly more declamatory style (I'm being relative here). It would be very clever ears, however, that would notice the changeover without being told, as both trios create seamless,

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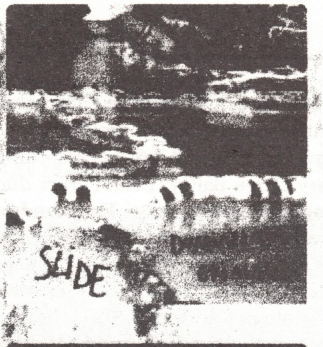
**Declan O'Driscoll**

**Spontaneous Music Ensemble**, Low Profile (1977-1988) (Emanem 4031 CD)
**John Butcher/Phil Durrant/John Russell**, The Scenic Route (Emanem 4029 CD)
**Derek Bailey & Evan Parker**, Arch Duo (Rastascan BRD045 CD)
A rare and rewarding opportunity to hear possibly the most unusual and underrated SME: the strings 'n' drums line-up of Nigel Coombes (violin), Colin Wood (cello), Roger Smith (acoustic guitar) and John Stevens (percussion, cornet), who appear on the longest (31:36) and shortest tracks (the others, engaging trios without Wood) on the previously unissued **Low Profile** — recorded in Derby several months after their only LP **Biosystem** (Incus) in 1977. That epic piece, tastelessly titled 'The Only Geezer An American Soldier Shot Was Anton Webern', is the main attraction here, combining Stevens' deft, skittery, scurrying, non-rhythmic percussives with the close-knit timbres of the string trio — Smith's and Coombes' resonant pizzicato often difficult to distinguish. Stevens's long-tones cornet and probably Tibetan monk-influenced vocal drones turn detailed Western abstraction into an exotic, aberrant kind of Asian ceremonial music.

It's been several years since **Concert Moves** (Random Acoustics), the superb second recording by the Butcher/Durrant/Russell trio. A hard album to follow, but **The Scenic Route** pulls it off with aplomb, demonstrating an even higher level of collective attunement in concert recordings from Musique Action (Vandoeuvre, France) and Mopomoso (London), 1998. While Parker/Guy/Lytton continue to astonish us with the ebullient physicality of their playing, Butcher (saxes), Durrant (violin) and Russell (acoustic guitar) captivate with an economy, poise and precision of gesture reminiscent of the spirit, if not the soundworld, of Giuffre, Bley and Swallow. Polished but not polite, neat but never fastidious, their intricate textural inventiveness is subtly channelled into an impressive developmental flow where some surprisingly lyrical episodes, led by Butcher's sensitive soprano, emerge from more turbulent activities. World-class improvising.

Finally, a new but, alas, not a recent recording by the legendary Derek Bailey/Evan Parker duo which, amazingly, released 'only' **The London Concert** (1975) and **Compatibles** (1985) LPs before disbanding. Given their split now appears terminal, it's heartening that both consented to **Arch Duo** — live in California, 1980. The five improvisations are closely argued, tightly structured, full of lively, flinty debate, though flexible enough for occasional solos. Bailey opens 'One' with characteristic swift and subtle use of volume/sustain pedal(s); by 10 minutes his astringent string-grappling is sufficiently unorthodox to raise a few titters from the audience. Happily, Parker's dialogically restrictive circular breathing is minimised, though dramatically deployed as tension-builder against Bailey's souped-up Segovia-like plucking on 'Three'. 'Four' begins with Bailey in humorous talk 'n' play mode, while 'Five' hears Parker's soprano suddenly unleash a blitzkrieg of piercing high-pitch tones. Indispensable, of course. (*Emanem, 3 Bittacy Rise, London NW7 2HH / Rastascan Records, P.O. Box 3073, San Leandro, CA 94578-3073, USA*)
**Chris Blackford**

**Phil Minton Quartet**, Up Umea
(Blue Tower Records BTCD 07 CD)
**Mats Gustafsson**, The Education Of Lars Jerry
(Xeric XER-CD-100 CD)
**Gush**, Live In Tampere
(Dragon Records DRCD 327 CD)
Since the vocal contortions, for which Phil Minton is best known, became his main form of expression his excellence as a trumpeter has largely been forgotten. The recordings he made with the Mike Westbrook Orchestra do offer glimpses of his playing, but never so clearly as on **Up Umea**, a well recorded studio session from January 1969, with just three other musicians, all of them from Sweden. The alto player Lars Göran Ulander was largely a disciple of Ornette Coleman and the compositions, all by Minton, have the sprightly charm of many of Coleman's early 60s pieces. Hard then not to hear Minton as a Don Cherry, particularly in the unison passages, and I suspect he did draw on that source for his superbly easeful.

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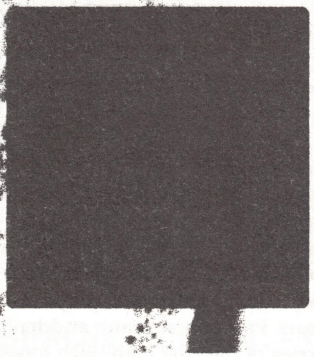

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Marc Feld texts and voice

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fluid phrasing. What distinguishes him, is that already he was using his voice to startling effect, interspersing thematic material with the now characteristic cracked notes and guttural, fractured exclamations. 'Wood Song Five', the most extended example of his early vocal work, already exhibits some of the multifarious techniques and personas he would later develop to such astonishing effect. Here he is like a sheep farmer in a Halldór Laxness novel calling across the mountains at sundown. The three Swedish musicians play beautifully throughout on what is a really worthwhile issue of previously unreleased recordings. Earthy, honest and joyous.

Mats Gustafsson's second solo CD finds him in the unlikely setting of the art gallery of Chicago's Renaissance Society which has a reverb of about three seconds. This Gustafsson utilises to dramatic effect, the great fireworks of sound he loves to ignite hang suspended in the air before they decay and return to silence, and silence never seems more silent than when he lays down his horn. There are times when it comes close to the "deep listening" strategy of Pauline Oliveros, but the exhilarating roar of this music rules out any meditative potential. As with all Gustafsson's recordings, it is the unrelenting physical 'thereness' of the music which impacts most. He is fascinated by the way wood and metal transform his breath and the torn beauty of the sounds he can create. While the saxophone resounds best in this setting, it is a track on which he plays French flageolet that is the most mysterious. 'Success in Drömme II' evokes both a whirlpool of sound and the stillness at the centre of movement.

Thorough and complete though his solo concept is, Gustafsson is also a great group player. Gush is a group of equals; the unforced but emphatic drumming of the marvellous Raymond Strid (see **Rubberneck 27**), the labyrinthine, intricately woven piano playing of Sten Sandell, together with Gustafsson's understanding of structure and space, leaves us with music which flows unhindered from clamorous complexity to sparsely shattered stillness. (*Blue Tower Records, Rörstrandsgatan 25, 11340 Stockholm, Sweden / Xeric, P.O. Box 8172, Atlanta, Georgia 31106, USA / Dragon Records, Box 4068, 102 62 Stockholm, Sweden*)

**Declan O'Driscoll**

**Pandelis Karayorgis & Mat Maneri,** Lift & Poise (Leo Lab 041 CD)

**Malcolm Goldstein & Peter Niklas Wilson,** Monsun (True Muze 9801 CD)

**Goldstein/Heward/Weins,** Chants Cachés (Ambiances Magnétiques 066 CD)

The microtonalism of the Boston-school can seem unremittingly bleak, operating within a very narrow emotional range. Once the ears have adjusted to hearing the notes-between-the-notes, however, gradations of light and shade become more apparent. These 1996-7 recordings, co-led by pianist Karayorgis and violinist Mat Maneri, present 12 "improvised movements" with guest spots for bassist John Lockwood and the ever-impressive Joe Maneri on reeds. The pieces sound typically cool and chamberesque, notes emerging as surges rather than flowing lines. Blues is out, Schoenberg and Webern in. The efforts of the microtonalists to create a new lexicon for improvisors are to be applauded, and this is one of the better examples of the style.

The two discs featuring violinist Malcolm Goldstein are rather more expansive in their approach and range. Active in New Music since the early 1960s, Goldstein has retained a strong interest in improvisation. **Monsun** consists of solo pieces and duos with bassist Peter Niklas Wilson recorded in Hamburg in 1996. Possessing a harsh folksy tone similar to Billy Bang, Goldstein's awareness of timbre, texture and articulation are impeccable. His two solo features are the most impressive items, though Wilson is a capable and sympathetic cohort, never impeding Goldstein's flow as the pair shape tightly focused improvisations. **Chants Cachés** by contrast is a plugged-in affair, decidedly electroacoustic. The organic/laminal approach to improvisation of AMM is ever present, though with wider external references. Every so often shards of delta blues, jazz, gamelan, and African music emerge. Each musician knows the other's parameters and a high degree of empathy is evident. John Heward uses a predominantly metallic percussion set-up, very different from his free jazz burnouts with the late Glenn Spearman, and Rainer Weins' prepared guitar produces a panoply of beguiling effects. By virtue of the relative pitches of the instruments, Goldstein unintentionally emerges as the lead

voice on these very different and satisfying discs. *(Leo Lab, Abbotsford Orchard, Abbotskerswell, Newton Abbot TQ12 5NW, England / True Muze, Hohenesch 61a, D-22765 Hamburg, Germany / Ambiances Magnétiques, 4580 Avenue de Lorimier, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H2H 2B5)*
**Fred Grand**

**Fred Frith & Henry Kaiser**, Friends & Enemies (Cuneiform Rune 117/118 2CDs)
**Eugene Chadbourne & Henry Kaiser**, The Guitar Lesson (Victo cd064 CD)
**Leonid Soybelman**, Surfing In My Bed (Review Records rere 195 CD)

**With Friends Like These** (1979) — here reissued as part of this **Friends & Enemies** double CD collection, 1979-1999 — shook up my teenage soundworld after Henry Cow's 'Oslo' had turned it upside down in 1976. 20 years on, **With Friends** still excites with its mangled textures, angular rhythms and fleeting rock references. Frith's and Kaiser's sharp-eared free improvising navigated a bold, unfaltering course through the jagged terrain of noise aesthetics, their extended playing techniques sculpting a new electric guitarphonics based on the 60s groundwork of Bailey, Rowe and Hendrix. Although many guitarists now do likewise, **With Friends** remains a vital document and, to my ears, still unsurpassed in this field.

Its successor, **Who Needs Enemies** (1983) — also reissued in its entirety — saw guitar experimentation disappointingly marshalled by some unremarkable drum machines and a greater dependency on idiomatic references (blues, folk). Those machines also play a leading role on the live tracks from 1984, but are thankfully jettisoned for the previously unissued January 1999 studio session, where these important guitarists return with renewed vigour to the spikier pleasures of their earliest collaboration.

Like Henry Kaiser, Eugene Chadbourne was also exploring the aesthetics of noise in the late 70s (perhaps most intensively with John Zorn; see **In Memory Of Nikki Arane** on Incus); and according to the press flyer **The Guitar Lesson** is "an homage to the great Derek Bailey!" This is most evident on the last and longest track, 'Letter To Derek', which adopts Bailey's fertile talk 'n' play approach. Giggling like a couple of excitable schoolkids, they recall (and impersonate) first hearing their hero, amid a sprinkling of amusing Derek-related anecdotes. The playing is a rich mix of the fast, fiddly and flamboyant, superbly tied in to the dynamics of the conversation. Elsewhere, the mostly acoustic improvising is more introspective and painstaking in its development, with flashes of bluesy licks, shuffling grooves and lute-like delicacy. A feast of virtuoso avant-guitar.

Estonian guitarist Leonid Soybelman is part of the same eclectic avant-guitar tradition as Frith, Kaiser and Chadbourne, and in an area of improv jam-packed with idiosyncratic talent he has still managed to craft a work of striking originality in **Surfing In My Bed**. Using a classical Spanish guitar amplified with a Piezo pick-up, played through a small "Buddy" amp, he revels in a deliciously dirty, corrupted soundworld where unstable current, ingenious techniques and preparations, amp cranked to maximum treble or bass (not forgetting those woollen blankets) spit out a blizzard of spluttering, crackling, whining, rumbling, hissing, glorious sonic delirium. *(Cuneiform Records, P.O. Box 8427, Silver Spring, MD 20907-8427, USA / Les Disques Victo, C.P. 460 Victoriaville, Québec, Canada, G6P 6T3 / Review Records, c/o No Man's Land, Strassmannstr. 33, D-1024 Berlin, Germany)*
**Chris Blackford**

**Global Guaranty Orchestra**, Weltmeister (Ninth World Music NWM017 CD)
**London Electric Guitar Orchestra**, 13 Lumps Of Chease (2:13 Music 2:13CD005 CD)
**Robert Rutman**, 1939 (Pogus Productions P21017-2 CD)
**Eugene Chadbourne And The Insect And Western Party**, Beauty And The Bloodsucker (Leo CD LR 270 CD)

The GGO hail from Denmark, and since 1984 have produced six albums. This, their seventh, seems a good reason to seek out the others. Tracks are based around repetitive drum patterns overlaid with generally improvised playing. This produces quite jolly sounds but is limited in improv terms. Something like a funky zoviet france or Muslim-gauze, with eastern influences and drum machines mixing in drifting clouds of pulsing, clanking noise, this is reminiscent of those 1980s 'funky

alternatives' albums. Gamelan percussion, home-made instruments, bouzouki, oud, steel koto, flute, trombone, marimba, swing along in slaphappy surreal soundscapes that are mostly relaxing and cheerful. GGO suggest that you can dance to this, hoover to it, or listen to it with a cup of tea.

LEGO ransack pop and rock guitar genres from the 1950s on. This loose seven-piece are flippant, dadaistic and haphazard. Three tracks have throwaway lyrics which come close to spoiling things, but generally this is good stuff; one track, 'slump', seems to be a twisted lament for Dodi and Di. Phrases that came to mind are Heath Robinson joins The Shadows; lo-fi Duane Eddy in the kitchen; and Themes for Dada TV. Much better than their patchy **Saint Gorilla** from a couple of years back. Very British quaint whimsy; although, by their names it seems unlikely that they are actually all British. Something to listen to between Half Man Half Biscuit and the Bonzos.

**1939** is far from frivolous rock sensibility. This is drone stuff of various kinds, using home-made instruments including steel cello, bow chime and buzz chime. Supplemented by chanting, tabla, Tibetan horn and trumpet, Rutman creates thoughtful, often beautiful music. Five pieces range from insistent industrial metallic to Buddhist spiritual, stretching across Africa, Australia, Tibet, India and Arabia for inspiration. One track features that incredibly low Buddhist chanting. I find the sound stunning, and am always transfixed by it. How is it done? To me, that mystery is part of the power. This album needs a couple of listens, but is rewarding and meditative.

From the sublime back to the headstrong, Chadbourne delivers the goods yet again, with an ensemble work exploring the "beauty as well as the horrors of insect life". Joined by luminaries such as Leonid Soybelman, Gino Robair, ex-Violent Femme Brian Ritchie, and Ellery Eskelin, Chadbourne flits dementedly between genres (C&W, jazz, punk, noise) as well as recording qualities: from pristine digital vacuum to cheap tape recorder in a suitcase in the next room, to create a coherent, chaotic mess of forms and fun. As always with Chadbourne, the sheer joy and humour shine through, and I got that comforting feeling of being at an improv hoedown overseen by an acid-soaked hillbilly. Always a pleasure, never a chore. (*Ninth World Music, Humlebækvej 56, DK-3480 Fredensborg, Denmark / 2:13 Music, 139 Gibson Gardens, London N16 7HH / Pogus Productions, 50 Ayr Road, Chester NY 10918, USA / Leo Records, Abbotsford Orchard, Abbotskerswell, Newton Abbot TQ12 5NW, England*)

**Jim Barker**

**Doppelmoppel**, Aventure Québécoise
(Victo cd065 CD)
**All Time Present**, All Time Present
(Bottom Feeder BF03 CD-R)
**Emidio Buchinho**, Toltech
(Ananana RRR001 CD)
**Misha Feigin**, Both Kinds Of Music
(Leo Lab CD 060 CD)

A two guitar, two trombone line-up suggests the potential for excess, a rush towards a mess of bluster and feedback, exciting but obvious. Dopplemoppel, however, upend all expectations. From the start they demonstrate an immense understanding of group dynamics with a subtle smudging of outlines by Johannes and Konrad Bauer, as Uwe Kropinski picks his acoustic guitar in unambiguously lyrical fashion, immediately defying every expectation. Joe Sachse joins in on electric guitar to bring the music in another direction, a move towards rhythmic alignment that draws caustic comments from the Bauers. There is plenty of that kind of unlaboured humour where, for example, Sachse's quote from 'Goodbye Pork Pie Hat' is elbowed by a fractious, mumbling Johannes Bauer. Key to the success of this live performance is the distinctiveness of each player's musical voice; their collisions and dislocations, supportive or subversive as the music needs, and always alert to where the music might go.

Such is not the case, unfortunately, with All Time Present, three indistinguishable guitarists engaging in textural improvisations in which the component parts fail to merge into a coherent whole or emerge to nullify the blandness that soon sets in. Occasionally the concurrent but unconnected playing clears to reveal a fleeting glimpse of exhilaration. On track four, for instance, they achieve a definite momentum, a positive, if predictable pursuit of the ecstatic that has, at least, the element of energy. This self-produced CD-R is further evidence that the new technology will

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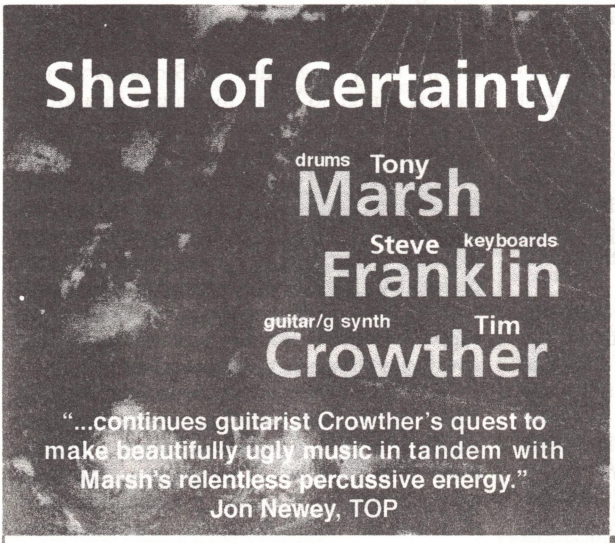


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inevitably lead to a clutter of ill-considered releases.

Then you listen to the first CD by Portuguese guitarist Emidio Buchinho, which is so impressive that the ready availability of the format seems, again, like a boon. Buchinho's recording attempts, like many debut releases, to demonstrate every aspect of the musician's abilities which makes for uneven, though almost always rewarding listening. Buchinho appears to not so much play the guitar as use it as a receiver of encoded signals, a transmitter of static drones. The best tracks crackle with fissured electricity. 'Strive' explodes with aggressive sounds, like the shooting of bottles being broadcast on short wave. Actual radio sounds are used too, bringing, inevitably, Keith Rowe to mind. The influence of Hans Reichel is also evident, particularly on 'Soul' where dislocated notes grope towards melodic cohesion, but there's enough of Buchinho's own strategies to suggest that a truly startling recording will follow.

Misha Feigin adopts another familiar format for his debut, by collaborating with a number of musicians already well established on the improvised music scene, all of them string players like Feigin, who plays classical guitar and balalaika. The results are quite varied, at times mired in an unyielding knot of sound when the players, particularly Elliott Sharp and Eugene Chadbourne, are stylistically approximate to Feigin. More interesting are the duos with the cellist Craig Hultgren and the excellent LaDonna Smith on violin, where the difference of instrumentation allows the music to expand and the players to soar, free of genres or referents. (*Bottom Feeder, 326 St John's Pl. D1, Brooklyn, NY 11238, USA*)
**Declan O' Driscoll**

**The Sun Ra Arkestra meets Salah Ragab in Egypt**
(Golden Years GY 1 CD)
**The Ganelin Trio**, Con Affetto
(Golden Years GY 2 CD)
**Anthony Braxton**, Composition No. 94 (1980)
(Golden Years GY 3 CD)
**Geerken/Tchicai/Moye**, Cassava Balls
(Golden Years GY 4 CD)
To celebrate its 20th anniversary and the new millennium, Leo Records has launched a new label entitled "Golden Years of New Jazz". Its aim: to remind us that free jazz is at least 40 years old, and to release some of its historic moments. The **Sun Ra Arkestra meets Salah Ragab in Egypt** was originally released on the Praxis label in 1983. Side B of that album was Ragab with the Cairo Jazz Band. This reissue contains an extra Ra track 'Watusa', from a different concert, plus one by the Cairo Free Jazz Ensemble. Most of the performances are percussion and riff orientated, with some additional hot big-band Africana thrown in. Mostly it will appeal to Ra fans, and if they haven't heard this album before, they should.

Of these "historic" concerts, **Con Affetto**, by the Ganelin Trio is the real treasure. It has an irresistible sense of momentum and anticipation, with Ganelin conjuring from his Casio a majestic sound of world-historic proportions. It's almost perfect, and certainly a high-point of free jazz in the 80s.

Braxton's **Composition No. 94**, For Three Instrumentalists, finds him with trombonist Ray Anderson and guitarist James Emery in Bologna in 1980. Their brief tour of Italy was the only time they performed together as a trio, and marked the last appearance of **Composition 94**. I'm sure it was an enthralling performance, but it is re-presented with historical sound. The second set is the most compelling. They re-play in reverse order the pages of the score they played in the first set, and somehow it does seem to be going backwards. It also includes Braxton's and Anderson's most satisfying solos, and Emery's electronics are less jarring. The appealing thing about Braxton's compositions is how successfully they blur the line between freedom and structure, and this is evident here. Eccentric, and probably 'tri-centric' too.

**Cassava Balls** was another LP originally released on the Praxis label documenting the trio of Hartmut Geerken (piano/percussion/miscellaneous), John Tchicai (sax/flute/perc) and Famoudou Don Moye (drums/perc) at the 1985 Praxis Festival in Athens. It now includes three bonus tracks. Tchicai is in fine form with some chunky tenor, and Geerken is dynamic and rhythmic on piano. There is an abundant use of a miscellany of percussion and wind instruments, including the conche and Tibetan horn, and also the voice, some of it successful, some not. There are several very good moments, and they certainly brought the spirit of Africa with them following

# D I S C U S

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Martin Archer's electronic and improvised music label features both solo and duo releases Beginners should start with "Ghost Lily Cascade", where Archer's trademark detailed synth work meets a variety of improvising soloists. Also available is "88 Enemies", a set of works for virtual pianist and electronics inspired by Stockhausen, Feldman and Nancarrow.

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Archer's duo CD with Simon H. Fell is "Pure Water Construction", in which improvisations by Stefan Jaworzyn, Chris Burn, Jenni Molloy, Robin Hayward and Rhodri Davies have been digitally reshaped and reprocessed into new electroacoustic compositions.

*"Every track is a modernist gem"*

Transient v Resident is Archer's long standing duo with synthesist Chris Bywater. Their ambient to abrasive style is heard on "Electrical Shroud".

*"You can hear the machines think"*

ASK is Archer's duo with master guitarist John Jasnoch. Their debut CD "Disconnected Bliss" is a studio construct of improv rock and beyond.

*"Almost impossibly direct and intense"*

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their tour, but I'm not sure this is a golden moment in free jazz. (*Leo Records, Abbotsford Orchard, Abbotskerswell, Newton Abbot TQ12 5NW, England*)
**Mark Greenaway**

**Eddie Prévost Quartet**, Continuum +
(Matchless Recordings MRCD07 CD)
**Jon Lloyd**, Four And Five
(Hat Hut Records HatOLOGY 537 CD)
**HV-West**, Zunder
(Unit Records UTR 4117 CD)
**Bertrand Denzler Cluster**, Y?
(Leo Lab CD 053 CD)
The original release of Prévost's 1983 Bracknell appearance represents one of the few 'must haves' of British free jazz. This re-release with studio material from 1985 confirms and enhances its status. The new material has an altogether more thoughtful air than the intoxicating intensity of the festival recording. The gorgeous 'I'm In The Mood For A Semantic Theory' is an almost totally unexpected straight(ish) ballad, and Larry Stabbins' saxophone reminds one forcefully of Archie Shepp in Ben Webster mode. There is a clarity to the studio material which proves the rhythm section, (Weston, Mattos and Prévost) to be one of the music's most versatile and imaginative. Prévost, in particular, is revealed as one of the most impressive of free jazz drummers; a role he inhabits far too rarely.

Jon Lloyd's latest offering is perhaps not quite as impressive but displays an equally varied approach to improvisatory process. Lloyd continues his experiments with open-ended compositions as a basis for his music making. Whether this tendency is bred by insecurity or a genuine need for greater structure, I applaud the experiment whilst questioning some of the results. Unlike previous Lloyd experiments this at times feels constrained by his compositions and seems to want to burst out from them. One is too often dragged away from fascinating developing ideas in favour of the preordained. This said, there is a great deal of wonderfully inventive interplay between the musicians and perhaps all this group needs is more time with the material to fully absorb it into its collective process.

HV-West walks a strange line between rather dry sounding if immaculately played jazz and less than convincing free improvisations. Compositions are again in evidence but there is little of the searching and experiment found in the work of Lloyd. There is perhaps too much attempted variety in the music and one is never quite sure what it is that the group does best.

Denzler is the weak link for much of **Y?** but shines on the deliciously dreamy 'Weird'. The real musical interest is to be found in fine musicians that make up the rest of the 'cluster'. Bassist Hélène Labaarière is a real find. There are too few free bassists of this calibre and one suspects a full diary in the coming years. Pianist Benoît Delbecq is particularly fine both in straight improvisations and in percussive prepared piano sections. In these the pianist is joined in empathic discourse with percussionist Norbert Pfammatter. Denzler to his credit allows these musicians to dominate proceedings and what results is a finely wrought and cohesive musical discourse that should delight anyone interested in improvisation. (*Matchless Recordings, 2 Sherlock's Cottages, Matching Tye, near Harlow, Essex CM17 0QR, England / HAT Hut Records, 4106 Therwil, Switzerland / Unit Records, P.O. Box 53, CH-1789 Lugnorre, Switzerland*)
**Bruce Coates**

**Sachiko M/Günter Müller/Otomo Yoshihide**, Filament 2 (For 4 Ears CD 1031 CD)
**Martin Tétreault/Otomo Yoshihide**, 21 Situations
(Ambiance Magnétiques AM 069 CD)
**Repeat**, Temporary Contemporary
(For 4 Ears CD 1032 CD)
**Rhys Chatham**, Hard Edge
(The Wire Editions WIRE 9002-2 CD)
**Filament 2** is futuristic ambient music, or more precisely: this is derelict space ambient, the sound that a night-watchman on board the Mir space station may have long ago gotten used to, the sound of machines playing themselves. The fact that I often forgot that people were involved in the production of **Filament 2** is a testament to the light touch of its players. Instead I felt that nano machines were building themselves slowly and laboriously into sound, communicating through squeaks and drones, hums and whines, until they set up a hive of sine waves, oscillators and logarthythms. At times they become agitated by a kind of hypermicroscopic brownian motion, at

other times they creak and judder, as if about to topple, at others maintain a reticent silence. It's also a testament to this style of sound that this listener finds himself with startling images and mind-scapes like this nano machine society in his head.

**21 Situations** finds Yoshihide on more familiar territory, alongside French-Canadian turntable abuser Tétreault, banging out 21 short, radio-friendly slabs of surface noise, technical detritus and musical dementia. All tracks are under four minutes, and the approach is as varied as the subject matter (e.g. cartoon, machine, tension, science fiction). And it's not just scratching; those drum sounds you hear from time to time are not samples but the players drumming on the turntables. Familiarity with technology has bred contempt, which has in turn bred imagination and adventure. This is gamelan for the 21st Century. A fine example of revolutionary improv.

Repeat is Toshimaru Nakmamura (A Paragon of Beauty) and Jason Kahn (Cut), and explores "slowly revolving repetitive structures and textures", which is a pretty accurate description. Nakmamura uses a "no-input mixing board", which is a concept I've never heard of. Sounds good though. **Temporary Contemporary** has a futuristic gamelan feel, mixing electronics with metal percussion to create minimalist journeys that evoke the human body, space and underwater soundscapes. Thoughtful circles that sometimes break into hyperactive dervishes.

Rhys Chatham has been blurring the boundaries between improv/experimental and punk/rock for years, but this is the first time I've heard him. Although he's better known as a guitarist (with Arsenal and as a symphonic guitar composer), he is also a demon trumpeter. On this album he fuses his eclectic hard bop style, which is often uncannily like Miles Davis, with guitar, bass, percussion and the item which is fast becoming de rigueur for all kinds of music, electronics. Our own Pat Thomas has a lot of input on this album and keeps the sounds fresh and unpredictable, providing a dazzling contrast to the trumpet work. There's even a dancefloor-filling drum and bass track! (or is it jungle? Who can keep up?) Chatham's work on the electric trumpet is also startling, and sounds exactly like electric guitar on some tracks. *The Wire* magazine are onto a winner here. Unashamedly idiomatic, this is a new wrinkle in jazz, which is a wonder in itself. Highly recommended. (*For 4 Ears Records, Steinechtweg 16, CH 4452 Itingen, Switzerland / Ambiances Magnétiques, 4580 Avenue de Lorimier, Montréal QC, H2H 2B5, Canada / The Wire Editions, 45-46 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF, England*)
**Jim Barker**

**Phil Durrant/Thomas Lehn/Radu Malfatti,** Beinhaltung (Fringes CD 03 CD)
**Tony Marsh/Steve Franklin/Tim Crowther,** Shell Of Certainty (Visionlogic VLG101 CD)
**Dominique Grimaud,** Slide
(Vand'oeuvre 9915 CD)
**Guiseppe Ielasi/Renato Rinaldi/Domenico Sciajno/Gino Robair,** May 15th
(Fringes CD 001 CD)

The two improvisations on **Beinhaltung** are a triumph of self-discipline and aesthetic judgement. In the experimental tradition of Feldman and Wolff the music consists of small sounds and groups of sound framed by dramatic silences. One is held in rapt attention by the players' impeccable judgements and thought processes. As I write this, my usually inaudible computer sounds like a Harley-Davidson when compared to this exquisite collection of pianissimo rattles, scrapes, breath noises and whistles. The introduction of a very occasional loud sound is shocking. Both pieces finish after a sudden increase in activity and volume almost as if the players could no longer hold back.

This kind of discipline is exactly what **Shell Of Certainty** lacks. Combining free improvisation with aspects of jazz rock sounds and phrasing, the music making seems ironically uncertain and there is a rather vague quality to the pieces. The constant activity becomes tiresome and there is a lack of space and reflection throughout. What promise to be interesting ideas are not developed or are lost in the general confusion. Synthesizer and guitar sounds that are unpleasant enough in jazz rock just seem out of place in free improvisation. Marsh's deft and accurate drumming is as usual excellent but his relentless presence throughout the CD contributes to a general feeling of claustrophobia.

Grimaud's project seems to have been instigated as part of an art installation. The music

reflects this and a group of improvisors create five almost static soundtracks — some very filmic in quality. The presence of dobro (and Cicada noises!) make some of the tracks feel like psychedelic Western themes, whilst one track turns unexpectedly into heavy rock halfway through. This playful quality is a delight and it is refreshing that they don't submit to the temptation of outright parody. Much of the music is electric and electronic. Acoustic instruments play second fiddle; for instance, Michel Doneda's saxophone contributes only fleeting solos. This is a constantly fascinating mix which conjures up a wealth of ideas and images.

**May 15th** combines double bass, guitar and other unspecified strings with the percussion playing of the excellent Gino Robair. All the musicians employ percussion as well but this distinction hardly matters, as the improvisations are celebrations of the percussive possibilities of their instruments. There is an almost brutally hard-edged quality to many of the sounds that are made (probably a consequence of the living room recording venue's dry acoustic) which makes for some challenging but ultimately very rewarding listening. Both Fringes CDs present improvisations of the highest quality and make future releases from this new label an exciting prospect. (*Fringes, c/o Guiseppe Ielasi, via A. Volta 6, 20052 Monza, Italy / Visionlogic, P.O. Box 24365, London SW17 9FG / Vand'oeuvre, c/o CCAM, BP 126, 54504 Vandoeuvre-lès-Nancy Cedex, France*)
**Bruce Coates**

**Orlando Jacinto Garcia**, Celestial Voices
(O.O. Discs, 0042 CD)
**Gavin Bryars**, The North Shore
(Materiali Sonori New Classics, MASO 90108 CD)
**Robert Reigle**, The Marriage Of Heaven And Earth
(Acoustic Levitation AL 1002 CD)
**Dumitrescu/Avram/Cutler/Hodgkinson with the Hyperion Ensemble**, Musique Action 98
(ReR Recommended, DACH 1 CD)

That Orlando Jacinto Garcia studied under Morton Feldman is evident from the opening bars of 'Music For Berlin', which opens this recording. It has all the hallmarks of middle-period Feldman, yet Jacinto Garcia is no mere copyist. In **Celestial Voices** his Feldmanesque deployment of orchestral forces forms a canvas for the urgent, at times full-throated voices of two double basses. The result is a poised drama that develops Feldman's rare fortissimi (such as those in his String Quartet) in compelling fashion. Elsewhere, the composer makes imaginative use of tape and electronics, particularly in his 'Retratos I' for piano and tape, which convincingly extend a metrical and harmonic sensibility based on Feldman into electroacoustic composition.

The three pieces on the Bryars recording ('The North Shore', 'Intermezzo' and 'Allegrasco') are chamber pieces for cello, clarinet and piano: prime examples of his dry, undramatic lyricism. Nostalgic yet cool, supremely executed by the Harmonia Ensemble. My only complaint is the length of the recording, a little over 40 minutes (compare the Jacinto Garcia, not overstaying its welcome at almost 80 minutes).

Robert Reigle's **The Marriage Of Heaven And Earth** is perhaps a case of more not necessarily being better. The 70-odd minutes of this CD move through solo saxophone improvisation, group improvisation, composition (two versions of the title-track by Reigle and a movement from 'Pfhat' by Scelsi) and improvisation on a theme (Ayler's 'Bells'). There are many striking performances here (Reigle's keening high-register tenor; Stuart Dempster's trombone on 'A Dance Period'), but overall the album fails to cohere. The authentic ferocity and pain on the Ayler classic sits oddly with the austerity of the ensemble playing in the Scelsi. Even within pieces there are unsatisfying clashes: the tenor improvisation that accompanies the multitracked saxes of the title-track has little of their persistent, resonant beauty.

Iancu Dumitrescu's opening piece on **Musique Action 98** was inspired by witnessing a meteor falling to earth and features Chris Cutler coaxing monstrous, explosive crescendi from his electronic drums, surrounding them in a dense filigree of clatter and bustle. A superb opening. Cutler's own 'Life On Earth' is a composition that entails individual performer choice and action, with a score mysteriously comprising "a series of cards and 49 candles". Perhaps as much a visual experience as a sonic one, the piece feels more engaged in by the performers than much Cagean aleatorics. Ana Maria Avram's 'Nouvelle Axe For

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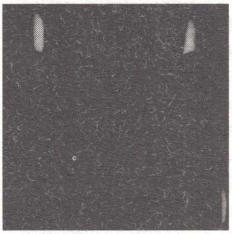
# LEO RECORDS NEW RELEASES

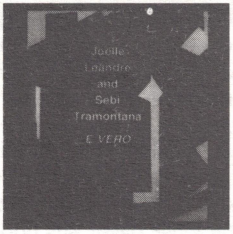
CD LR 271
**THE IVO PERELMAN QUARTET;**
***SIEIRO***

With every new recording Ivo Perellman opens something new in himself and in us. This time the rare comaraderie of Ulrich Tomas (cello), Dominic Duval (bass) and Jay Rosen (drums) helps him to create a recording full of passion and romantic balladry. His striving for melody is much more pronounced than ever before.



CD LR 274
**JOHN WOLF BRENNAN/ GENE COLEMAN/ CHRISTIAN WOLFARTH**
***MOMENTUM***

Duos and trios for piano and melodica (John Wolf Brannan), bassclarinet (Gene Coleman), and percussion (Christian Wolfarth) investigating the music of here and now, building bridges between improvising and new composition. Live studio recording, 10 pieces, total duration 63'43, notes by John Corbett.




CD LR 275
**JOELLE LEANDRE AND SEBI TRAMONTANA**
***E`VERO***

John Bickerton - piano, Rashid Bakr - drums, Matthew Heyner - bass. "I am no 'young lion' and I am happy not to be one. I learned about jazz in the 1970s and the groove then was to find your own sound, that was the premium, not how well you reproduced the sounds of the past" (John Bickerton).John Bickerton has arrived. He achieved the ultimate goal of a musician to find his own sound and his personality.

CD LR 277
**TIBOR SZEMZO**
***SNAPSHOT FROM THE ISLAND***

Reissue of the LP of the same title (1987) with which Tibor Szemzo took the minimal scene by storm breaking it apart in the process.One of the pieces, however, "Water-Wonder", was recorded anew in 1998. Two remaining pieces have been re-mixed for the CD version.

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String Quartet' couples a Webernian fascination with detail and an interest in maximising the material through explorations of acoustic distortion and interference fringes. 'Black Death And Errors' by Tim Hodgkinson is scored for piano, clarinets, tape, percussion and the five string players of the Hyperion Ensemble. This is timbrally and metrically an exhilarating and fiercely dramatic piece. (*O.O. Discs, 261 Groovers Avenue, Black Rock, CT 06605-3542, USA / Materiali Sonori, via Tre Novembre 2, San Giovanni Valdarno, 52027 (AR), Italy / Acoustic Levitation, 2625 East 13 Street 2K, Brooklyn, New York 11235-4422, USA*)
**Chris Atton**

**Ken Hyder/Dave Brooks/Maggie Nicols**, In The Stone (Impetus IMP CD 19732 CD)
**Denis Colin Trio**, Fluide
(in Situ, IS180 CD)
**Trio Nueva Finlandia**, Ha! What's Going On?
(Leo Lab, CD046 CD)
Although the credit leads one to expect a trio, Ken Hyder on drums performs a series of alternating duos (nine in all) with Dave Brooks on bagpipes and with Maggie Nicols, voice. For a grand finale, Hyder and Nicols are joined by Pete McPhail on low whistle, Don Patterson on guitar and Marcio Mattos on bass in the group Talisker. The music has the sound of folk music, albeit somewhat quirky folk music (or is true folk music essentially quirky?). The alternating format works well; Nicols' vocal work is intense throughout, almost painfully so at times ('To The Erudite'), and the instrumental tracks provide chances to reflect and recover. So spartan are the duo tracks that the closing quintet sounds rich by comparison. Talisker are potent.

The other two albums here are by genuine trios, and provide compelling evidence of the vitality of the format. Denis Colin Trio consists of the leader on bass clarinet, Ramon Lopez on drums and tabla, and Didier Petit on cello. The combination of clarinet and cello ensures a mellow tonal palette, with much of the interest in the lower registers. The cello is frequently used almost as a drone, providing a slowly evolving backdrop that is very effective. By contrast, there are sections of unison playing between clarinet and cello that are so precise as to suggest hours of painstaking rehearsal, certainly not improvisation.

Trio Nueva Finlandia all have excellent CVs. Saxophonist Baron Paakkunainen has played with Anthony Braxton's Ensemble Braxtonia, pianist Eero Ojanen with Dexter Gordon, Ben Webster and Johnny Griffin, and bassist Teppo Hauta-aho is a current member of Cecil Taylor's European Quintet. They founded this trio in 1993. Their music covers a broad spectrum, from blues to avant-garde, composed and free improvisation. Of the names from the CVs, Braxton and Taylor are more indicative of what one can expect than the other more straight-ahead jazz players. Much of the music has an edgy, episodic feel to it. Paakkunainen's use of flute contributes to the sense of unease. This is not relaxing music to listen to. (*Impetus Records, 10 High Street, Skigertsa, Ness, Isle Of Lewis, Outer Hebrides HS2 0TS, Scotland / in Situ, 199 rue Raymond Losserand, 75014 Paris, France*)
**John Eyles**

**Charles Gayle 3**, Abiding Variations
(FMP CD 100 CD)
**William Parker/In Order To Survive**, Posium Pendasem (FMP CD 105 CD)
**Sam Rivers & Alexander von Schlippenbach**, Tangens (FMP CD 99 CD)
It seems that the ability to screech in the upper registers is all that amounts to free sax playing in some quarters these days. Thankfully, tenor man Charles Gayle has a delivery that is far more than the sum of its notes. Just to prove that he really is carrying on the spirit of Albert Ayler, look no further than this new FMP disc, which is a studio set from 1993, recorded after Gayle's concert in honour of Ayler in Berlin (FMP CD 90). This is a much less hi-energy display from Gayle, serving to make his spiritual approach more pronounced. Captured in intimate close-up, with Vattel Cherry (bass) and Michael Wimberley (drums) — who are both excellent — the lion roars. Together, they show the importance of being earnest.

William Parker's double bass playing has reached dizzy heights of excellence, but on his latest CD he struggles to marshal his troops (Rob Brown/Assif Tsahar: saxes; Cooper Moore: piano; Susie Ibarra: drums) out of the foothills. For most of the 50 minutes of 'Posium Pendasem #7', his band enthusiastically generate a sonic nuclear

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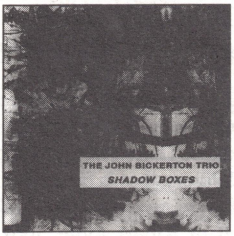
# LEO RECORDS
# NEW RELEASES

LEO LAB CD 062
**STEVEN LANTNER/ MAT MANERI**
***REACHING***

Steven Lantner (piano) and Mat Maneri (electric violin) began their musical journey together in 1986. They have a profound understanding of one another. The music of this duo is so original, it made Walter Horn write in his liner notes: "the birth of this complex and evocative music is an unsolvable mystery." Total duration 73'38.

LEO LAB CD 063
**THE REMOTE VIEWERS**
***OBLIQUES BEFORE PALE SKIN***

The follow-up to their first release (Low Shapes in Dark Heat, Leo Lab CD 049), the three saxophonists hit much harder at defining their aesthetic territory which sets them totally apart from anything else on the contemporary music scene. The voice of Louise Petts is much more pronounced than on the previous release. Total duration 60'35.




LEO LAB CD 064
**THE JOHN BICKERTON TRIO**
***SHADOW BOXES***

John Bickerton - piano, Rashid Bakr - drums, Matthew Heyner - bass. "I am no 'young lion' and I am happy not to be one. I learned about jazz in the 1970s and the groove then was to find your own sound, that was the premium, not how well you reproduced the sounds of the past" (John Bickerton).
John Bickerton has arrived. He achieved the ultimate goal of a musician to find his own sound and his personality.

CD LR 281
**TIBOR SZEMZO**
***THE OTHER SHORE***

In twenty years Tibor Szemzo will be recognised as a genius.

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blast, with prolonged shrieking by the saxophones leading the attack. The excitement lasts for several minutes, but its lengthy campaign shows a lack of imagination. The listener is forced to bow down to its might, and cannot engage with something that so excessively indulges in excess. By far the best moments are when Moore, Parker and Ibarra play by themselves. The closing 'Another Angel Goes Home', is very different: a memorable, low-key, bittersweet composition, which is immediately appealing. But more should have been made of it; its theme is a little too omnipresent for its own good. All in all: overcooked, then undercooked.

No problem with veteran Sam Rivers' playing, which displays the most diversity of all the saxophonists on these three CDs. Recently, at the Brecon Jazz Festival with Tony Oxley, pianist Alexander von Schlippenbach's massive fingers clunked down on the keyboard like bunches of bananas. Here, he displays something like deft tenderness. Rivers often changes the character of each piece by switching between flute, soprano and tenor; all played with a thoughtful, melancholic tinge. (*FMP distributed by Cadillac: 0171 278 7391*)
**Mark Greenaway**

**Ntshuks Bonga's Tokolosho**, Abo Bhayi
(Nota Bene, NBCD001 CD)
**Koch/Schütz/Studer & Músicos Cubanos**, Fidel
(Intakt, CD056 CD)
**Francine Luce**, Bò kay la vi-a
(Ogun OGCD 012 CD)
**Pago Libre**, Wake Up Call
(Leo Records CD LR 272 CD)
Collaborations between economically dominant musics (rock, jazz) and majority musics (aka 'world music') can have a number of outcomes, some successful, others less so. The two musics can sometimes fail to engage effectively, resulting in alternating sections of each (for example, think of early Indo-Jazz Fusions). Or the two musics can meet on common territory that is a lowest common denominator and diminishes both musics, giving a whole that is less than either of the parts.

One of the musics can be dominant, with the other being a significant but junior partner; often the economically dominant music is musically dominant but parasitic in such situations (yes, Paul Simon). But at their most successful, collaborations result in an equal meeting that produces new music that neither party could have produced alone, a whole greater than the sum of the parts. The amalgam of South African jazz and UK free jazz pioneered by The Blue Notes and Brotherhood of Breath undoubtedly enhanced both musics. Ntshuks Bonga is continuing that tradition, particularly their ability to balance rhythm with unpredictability. His own playing continues to show the influence of Dudu Pukwana in its energy and drive. The three-part title-track is a particular highlight, showcasing Winston Rollins on trombone and John Grieve on tenor sax to good effect.

**Fidel** finds Hans Koch, Martin Schütz and Fredy Studer in the company of Mùsicos Cubanos, a large Cuban vocal and percussion troupe. At its best, the resulting music integrates the two seamlessly, although there are also several instances of them alternating rather than integrating. The Cuban drumming provides an almost unceasing pulse on some tracks, and this gives them much of their appeal, even if there is an element of predictability to them. But there are surprises such as the duo between Koch's bass clarinet and (uncredited) timbales on 'Wood 'n' Timbales' where the two coalesce without any apparent compromise from either party. And the closing track, 'Silence Is A Rhythm Too', is a gem, a perfectly balanced meeting.

Francine Luce is a vocalist from Martinique, who is joined by the stellar line-up of Claude Deppa, Evan Parker, Paul Rutherford, Keith Tippett, Paul Rogers and Louis Moholo. Her heartfelt singing (in both French and English) dominates the album, and she is as inventive in her use of wordless vocal effects as any of the players on their instruments. As she notes: "The frogs, crickets and birds from Martinique are good improvisers, too." Her vocalising suggests she has listened hard to them. Intriguingly, Luce, Parker and Rogers play as a trio on the track 'Pokéya', on which all three are credited with playing "water", and Luce does sound rather bubbly. I can't wait for the live show!

By contrast with all of the above, Pago Libre display few leanings towards majority musics (despite titles of compositions which might indicate otherwise). If anything, their influences

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aaa001 - Telectu «Belzebu»
bbb001 - Carlos Zingaro «Musique de Scene»
ccc001 - Bernardo Devlin «World Freehold»
ddd001 - Rafael Toral «Sound Mind Sound Body»
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fff001 - Manuel M Mota «Environment Analysis Report»
ggg001 - Nuno Rebelo «M2»
hhh001 - V/A «Way Out - new music from portugal»
iii001 - Osso Exotico «V»
jjj001 - Free Field «Tales From Chaos»
kkk001 - Bernardo Devlin «Albedo»
lll001 - Nuno Rebelo «Azul Esmeralda»
mmm001 - V/A «Way Out - new music from portugal - vol 2»
nnn001 - No Noise Reduction «On Air»
ooo001 - Anabela Duarte «Delito»
ppp001 - Sei Miguel «Token CD+EP»
rrr001 - Emidio Buchinho «Toltech»

**FICTA RELEASES:**
ficta001 - Gonçalo Falcão «load " "» EP
ficta002 - Andre Maranha «Nacht und Träume» EP
ficta003 - Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzp! «Ficta003» EP
ficta004 - Discmen «Stucker» EP

**NON SERIES:**
non001 - Telectu, Louis Sclavis & Jac Berrocal «Jazz-Off Multimedia»
non002 - Ramuntcho Matta & Samon Takahashi - «Soundcards From Chile»

**OTHER RELEASES:**
tndmII001 - Carlos Zingaro «Cenas de uma Tarde de Verão»

*[...] Si les Allemands sont généralement réputés pour leurs qualités en matière d'electronique et les Français respectés pour leurs recherches électro-acoustiques, d'autres pays comme le Portugal ne sont pas en reste.* [**Octupus**] (France)

*[...] Ce label, (...) de par son entreprise et ses efforts, s'avére nécessaire au paysage des musiques de traverses. Saluons ici son existance et son audace extrême.* [**Improjazz**] (France)

*[...] Une nouvelle production du label lisboète expérimental AnAnAnA, mérite toujours une oreille attentive.* [**Keyboards**] (France)

*[...] A quick word about AnAnAnA: based in Lisbon, they're building up a very nice catalogue of all kinds of esoterica - ambient, soundscaping, contemporary composition - which would seriously puts some more established labels to shame.* [**Motion**] (UK)

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are within the western classical tradition. **Wake Up Call** is their third album and their first live recording. It was recorded before an enthusiastic Sicilian crowd, who seem to have enlivened the quartet. (*Nota Bene, 5 Chiltern Court, Avonley Road, London SE14 5EZ / Intakt Records, P.O. Box 468, CH-8024 Zürich, Switzerland / Ogun, c/o Cadillac Distribution, 61 Collier Street, London N1 9BE*)
**John Eyles**

**Joseph Holbrooke**, Joseph Holbrooke '65
(Incus CD Single 01 CD)
Like Derek Bailey & Evan Parker's **Arch Duo** on Rastascan (see review on page 35), **Joseph Holbrooke '65** is one of the most unexpected releases of the year. Until this disc arrived with its 10 and a half minute "rehearsal extract", very few improv devotees had heard the music of mid-60s Joseph Holbrooke (Derek Bailey, guitar; Gavin Bryars, double bass; Tony Oxley, drums), though many of us have read about their pioneering exploits in Bailey's book on improvisation. The piece here dates from 1965 and is an improvisation loosely based on Coltrane's 'Miles Mode'. While many of its moves are thematically based, there's also interesting evidence of a nascent non-idiomatic vocabulary of abstract textural playing. Bailey's sometimes fragmentary phrasing and Oxley's pan-rhythmic momentum are signs of the shape of things to come. History in the making.
**Chris Blackford**

**Jocelyn Robert**, Canned Gods
(Ohm Editions OHM/AVTR 014 CD)
**Matthew Ostrowski**, Vertebra
(Pogus Productions P21016 CD)
**Anal Magic And Rev. Dwight Frizzell**, Beyond The Black Crack (Paradigm Discs PD 06 CD)
**Pierre-Andre Arcand**, Les Machines Animales/Le Livre Sonore (Ohm Editions OHM/AVTR 013 CD)
Robert's album-length (42 mins) musique concrète suite is constructed from sound effects library recordings. It is subtitled "a typical afternoon in the backyard in Phoenix, Arizona" and seeks to radically interrogate the cultural signifiers selected by the compilers of such recordings to stand for the culture they are seeking to represent. Robert re-assembles their choices into nine related movements. Amongst his themes are 'street', 'home', 'war', 'pop': each disturbingly refracted into an urban mediascape.

Another album-length presentation, Ostrowski's (ex-Krackhouse DJ) **Vertebra** is a computer based exploration that seems full of a similar urban edginess. It unfolds at an occasionally dizzying pace and contains much microscopic detail that, whilst 'non-objective', stems from the same urban setting. Rich, abrasive and intelligent.

Difficult to get beyond the title and cover art of the re-release of Anal Magic and Rev. Dwight Frizzell's mid-70s LP **The Wandering Madness Of Basilia** (plus the inevitable unreleased material). Once inside (as it were), the listener is presented with a variety of largely lo-fi, bizarrely-edited sequences, largely based on improvisatory percussion rhythms and a halting jazz band. Shades of Ayler and Art Ensemble of Chicago (what am I saying?), much obscure thumping and muttering. Ron Pate's Debonairs spring to mind, though this lacks their lunatic and slanted virtuosic spark. Much of it sounds awfully dated, especially the in-recording tape speed manipulation during the live performances. Side 2 of **Neu! 2** it ain't. I find it remarkable that anyone feels this important enough to re-release — postmodernism, what hast thou wrought? After Paradigm's excellent Pauline Oliveros release (PD 04), I'm disappointed.

Imaginatively packaged (CD in lid of jewel case, beautiful booklet housed in cellophane in the body of the case), Pierre-Andre Arcand's 30-minute, five-track EP(?) would not be out of place as a Metamkine release. This is in fact two works: the booklet is **Le Livre Sonore** and the recording **Les Machines Animales**. The recording isn't musique concrète, however, but Arcand manipulating the 'resounding book' of the title (a 'book-object') with a variety of microphones. He shares Hugh Davies' fascination with self-built instruments that produce tiny sounds and the whole set is a compelling study in non-referential detail, micro-drama and patience. The booklet coolly expands and expounds on the principles and resonances of Arcand's focus. A joy. (*Ohm Editions, 541 Saint-Vallier Est #4, Québec, Qc, Canada G1K 3PG / Pogus Productions, 50 Ayr Road, Chester, NY 10918, USA / Paradigm Discs, Flat 9, Thane Mansions, Thane Villas, London N7 7PE*) **R**
**Chris Atton**

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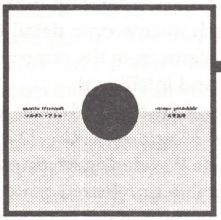

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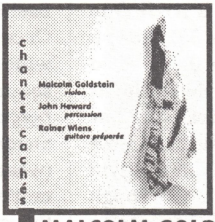


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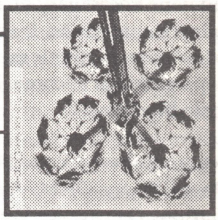

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# ShortCuts

*Reviewed by*
**Brian Marley**

**Evan Parker & Günter Christmann**, *Here Now: Solos/Duos* (Concepts Of Doing COD003 CD); **Günter Christmann & Alexander Frangenheim**, *Alla Prima* (Concepts Of Doing COD001 CD); **Phil Durrant & Alexander Frangenheim**, *Further Lock* (Concepts Of Doing COD002 CD) Parker's name comes first on the sleeve of **Here Now**. That's entirely appropriate given that his two features for soprano — an exploration of extended line and virtual polyphony, and its non-conformist coda — take up over half the disc; they also rank among his best solo performances on CD. Christmann responds by making every second count. His trombone solo, 'Quantum', is the most satisfying cut overall — a glossolalia of extended techniques put to thoroughly musical use. In the duets, Christmann's cello has insufficient presence, but his trombone registers superbly. He plays it superbly, too. His extensive repertoire of sounds include didgeridoo mutterings, golden glissandos, subterranean parps, and an approximation of a pocket trumpet with an airtight mute jammed in the bell. This is a fine set of improvisations, let down in one or two places by the recording.

The instruments are a little distant on **Alla Prima**, but crank up the volume and everything springs into focus. Frangenheim isn't the most mercurial of double bassists (unless, that is, you're comparing him with Charlie Haden), but the elements of his style are fairly well integrated, and his ambition and imagination rarely let him down. Christmann, an original stylist on both trombone and cello, is hugely impressive. The improvising by each of the players is never less than interesting, though their duo music sounds a tad more restless than purposeful. But sparks fly when Christmann swaps trombone for cello on the last three tracks. It's a pity they didn't employ that instrumentation throughout.

On 'First (early doors)', the opening track on **Further Lock**, Frangenheim and Phil Durrant trade low-key flageolet notes amid the approximated sounds of wood being sawn. But elsewhere there are dramatic gestures, pregnant pauses, a plethora of bold ideas. The Gateway Studio recording is all that could be hoped for, too. Durrant, playing violin without supplementary electronic gizmos, brings out the best — and the zest — in Frangenheim; their interplay is dynamic, purposeful, and thoroughly engaging. Each track contains so much detail it's the auditory equivalent of pondwater viewed through a microscope. This is an excellent CD — best of the batch. (*Concepts Of Doing, Im Schellenkönig 56d, 70184 Stuttgart, Germany*)

**Max Roach & Mal Waldron**, *Explorations... To The Mth Degree* (Slam 505 CD); **Eddie Prévost & Veryan Weston**, *Concert, V.* (Matchless MRCD37 CD); **Veryan Weston/John Edwards/Mark Sanders**, *Mercury Concert* (Emanem 4028 CD) Roach and Waldron are elder statesmen who've been playing jazz for more than half its recorded history, and each has made an important contribution to the music. But this live recording catches them below par. Ostensibly it replicates the formula of **Paris 1989**, the suite-like Gillespie/Roach concert which found both participants in sparkling form. Here, though, Waldron sounds strained and ill-focused except when he's lingering over ballads such as 'Mistral Breeze'. During the improvised segues he occasionally sounds like a record with a locked groove — until, that is, Roach deftly nudges him back into the musical flow. Ideas are sparse, and their turnover is leisurely. Despite Roach's attempts to fire things up, this would-be joyous and celebratory music is too often stodgy and just plain dull.

No such problems with Eddie Prévost and Veryan Weston. Their music-making is free and flowing. Nothing they do is pre-ordained, yet everything is coherent. Prévost's control of dynamics is masterful, as is his use of silence. The subtle drama he can bring to small punctuative bursts of activity is a joy to hear. Try, for example, the first few minutes of 'Sticks and Tones', in which interlocking asymmetrical patterns played on a hi-hat (I think) cymbal are gradually peppered

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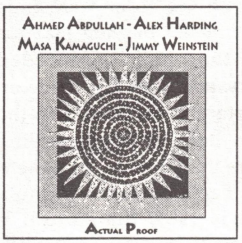


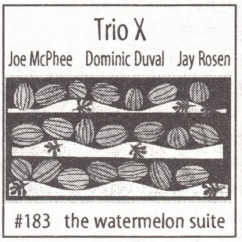

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with unexpected and unpredictable drumbeats.

In the 'Invisible Jukebox' column in *The Wire* #178, Derek Bailey, having listened to a minute or two of a Michael Finnissy piano piece, asked: "Does it carry on like this all the way through?" One of the things he meant was: Is it stylistically consistent? If this question were to be asked about Veryan Weston's playing, one would have to answer both yes and no. His style is premised on inconsistency, but not in a postmodern, highly ironic, pick 'n' mix way. He neither quotes nor approximates genres. He works at an idea then discards it, often unresolved, to work on another. But they're his own ideas, and invariably they're interesting.

Between the two sessions which make up **Concert, V.**, Weston fitted in a date at Colchester's Mercury Theatre. It was a quality gig, and the recording is excellent. Edwards and Sanders are as imaginative and inquisitive as Weston, and even during the monumental 'Longer Piece' (35:50) their concentration never wavers. 'Shorter Piece' contains various attack strategies and, apart from a brief lull near the end, hell-for-leather playing. 'Slightly Longer Than Shorter Piece' (no room for misunderstanding with titles such as these) marries the episodic nature of the former with the forceful obliqueness of the latter. Terrific solo contributions and a remarkable degree of interaction make the **Mercury Concert** probably the most satisfying trio music I've heard this year. (*Slam, 3 Thesiger Road, Abingdon OX14 2DX, England / Matchless Recordings, 2 Shetlock's Cottages, Matching Tye, near Harlow, Essex CM17 OQR, England / Emanem, 3 Bittacy Rise, London NW7 2HH*)

**Kaffe Matthews**, *CD Cécile* (Annette Works AWcd0003 CD); **Transient v Resident**, *WKCR* (Discus b-CD-R); **First Avenue**, *Shreds Of Evidence* (O.O. Discs 0050 CD); **Supersilent**, *4* (Rune Grammofon RCD 2007 CD) The transparency of sound and fluid transformations in Kaffe Matthews' earlier releases aren't so apparent on **CD Cécile**. Abrasive, densely textured music seems to be the order of the day. The scratchy, grainy 'Contact C' is the aural equivalent of sand in an egg mayonnaise sandwich, and despite the skewed romanticism suggested by the title 'My Love Gave Me A Blue Plastic Watch', a sampled fragment of casual conversation is turned into a threatening industrialised loop. Only the atmospheric 'Skagerrak' contains a measure of tranquillity, albeit of the icy, hypothermic, mind-shutting-down-as-death-fast-approaches variety. Matthews' violin can often be detected in the mix, but its role is mainly that of a sound generator. The primary instrument is a laptop computer running LiSa software, which Matthews exploits to the full. **CD Cécile** is definitely rewarding, but it's not an easy listen.

**WKCR** was produced by Martin Archer & Chris Bywater for the American radio station of that name. Their use of long, looping lines and evolving repetition owes something to both Terry Riley and Orbital (and perhaps even Tangerine Dream). Improvisation (transience) is in there somewhere, but it's hard to detect. Harsh, shimmering textures are foregrounded by echoey, soft-focus, electronic marimbas: a music of contrasts. The second disc, a CD-ROM, contains the same music (but in mono) and a screenful of meagre visuals — fibrous transparencies agitated between the lens and a variety of unfocused images. The music is convincing, but I couldn't be persuaded to sit through the video clip again.

In their use of irony (check out the sleeve and liner notes), First Avenue appear to be something like an electro-acoustic version of Devo, but musically they're much more interesting. Despite the highly evolved structure of many of the pieces, most have been arrived at through improvisational means. The trio's principal instruments are double bass, piano and oboe, supplemented by voices, English horn, guitar and lots of home-made (I suspect) electronics. They don't do much in the way of looping and sampling, and the directions taken by the music are largely unpredictable. 'Maximalist' exemplifies what First Avenue do best: extended instrumental technique applied to melodic, atmospheric explorations within a kaleidoscope of electronic sound. Apart from the slightly ponderous 'Oh Boy!', a multiphonics workout on oboe, everything about this disc is

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highly recommended.

Because of the players' associations (Terje Rypdal and ECM), the word 'jazz' is frequently used in Supersilent's publicity material. But that just means improvisation — there's no reliance on jazz licks or slick technique. As with First Avenue, the heightened structure makes you suspect that these are compositions worked up from extempore ideas. Nothing wrong with that, of course, especially when the results are so convincing. Whereas the First Avenue players are clearly wedded to 'correct' (if extended) instrumental technique and the cleanly delineated soundworld of contemporary classical music, Supersilent fuse rock sonority (murky, noisy and violent) with the more spacious and evocative strains of music composed for film. But they make music that is much too interesting to be subordinated to visuals. Though tracks like '4.3' threaten to explode or spin out of control, miraculously everything hangs together. Hi-energy music-making of great originality. (*Annette Works, P.O. Box 14077, London N16 5WF / Discus, Box 658, Sheffield S10 3YR, England / O.O. Discs, 261 Groovers Avenue, Black Rock, CT 06605, USA / Rune Grammofon, Akersgata 7, 0158 Oslo, Norway*)

**Michael Bisio & Joe McPhee,** *Zebulon* (CIMP 179 CD); **Joe McPhee/Dominic Duval/Jay Rosen,** *The Watermelon Suite* (CIMP 183 CD); **Joe McPhee/Dominic Duval/Jay Rosen/Rosi Hertlein,** *Rapture* (Cadence Jazz Records CJR 1106 CD) It has been said of Joe McPhee that his lyricism is cruel. Maybe; but he's a generous and supportive collaborator who never grandstands or otherwise hogs the limelight. This is only his second disc with Bisio, but on the basis of their interactions you'd think they'd been duetting for years. McPhee plays both alto and tenor saxes, and his Aylerish multiphonics glide in over Bisio's bass introduction to 'Makeover Makeover' like a free jazz wet dream. 'Kind Of A Ballad' deconstructs the gestures of balladry, and the music that results is ambiguous rather than ambivalent. Perhaps the key track is the lengthy 'Gracie's Amazing'. At the outset, McPhee hollers through his horn, Dewey Redman style, while Bisio bows the traditional tune 'Amazing Grace'. The air of spirituality is maintained throughout, despite some robust variations.

Duval is a scurrying and somewhat busier player than Bisio, and like drummer Jay Rosen he often works with sounds that are barely audible. Much of what Duval and Rosen do involves concentrated listening and non-tailored responses. These musicians draw sustenance from the jazz continuum, but they're not genre-bound. 'Points', 'Putter Piece' and both parts of 'Wecotdo' on **The Watermelon Suite** are more akin to free improv than free jazz. But whatever you want to call it, McPhee evidently relishes it all.

On **Rapture** the trio is joined by violinist Rosi Hertlein. She's a quality improvisor who immediately dives into the thick of things. In fact, McPhee is so taken with this violin/bass/drums trio, that for the first four minutes he doesn't play a single note. But the moment he starts playing, the musicians swivel on a dime and follow his lead. Elsewhere they play tag, and everybody gets a chance to be 'it'. This 1998 concert recording unfolds as a long and slightly troubled meditation on the "Negro National Hymn", 'Lift Every Voice And Sing'. In places it's a rollercoaster ride; in others it's calm, even elegiac.

Recordings of gigs can often seem long-winded on CD, even self-indulgent, however this 48-minute track never palls. 'Rapture' is, by comparison, a mere snippet at 12 minutes. McPhee sets the column of air in his saxophone buzzing like a didgeridoo, and intermittently sounds a handful of upper partials. Eventually, a gnarled saxophone line ensues, while Hertlein, Duval and Rosen slowly fill out the sound with tiny details. Even at the height of activity, this track never raises its voice above a whisper (admittedly a stage whisper). 'Points' and 'A Ballad In Their Own Way' on **The Watermelon Suite** manifest a similar feeling of quiet intensity, though their means of achieving it are somewhat different. Joe McPhee's recordings are always thoughtful and interesting, and these are three of the best. (*CIMP/Cadence Jazz Records, Cadence Building, Redwood, New York 13679, USA*) **R**

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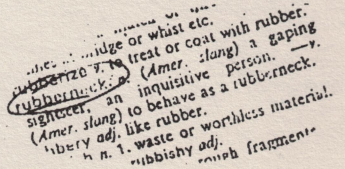


...short ideas repeated
Massage the brain...
**Robert Ashley, 1979**